Campione! Volume 15

source : http://www.baka-tsuki.org/project/index.php?title=Campione!Volume_15

These are novel illustrations that were included in "Campione! Volume 15".

女神の息子

カンピオーネ！ Campione XV

丈月城
Illustration シコルスキー

D スーパーダッシュ

Characters Introduction
主要登場人物

草薙護堂
高校1年生。
軍神ウルスラグナの権能を有するカンピオーネ。

エリカ・ブランデッリ
《赤銅黒十字》の魔術師。
自称、護堂の「愛人」。

万里谷祐理
霊視の力を持つ媛巫女。
護堂の「正妻」と称される。

リリアナ・クラニチャール
《青銅黒十字》の魔術師。
護堂の「騎士」を自任する。

清秋院恵那
当代随一とされる「太刀の媛巫女」。
護堂の「剣」として侍る。

サルバトーレ・ドニ
イタリア最強の騎士たる「剣の王」。

アイーシャ夫人
妖しき洞穴の女王とうたわれる謎多きカンピオーネ。

アリス・ルイーズ・オブ・ナヴァール
グリニッジ賢人議会前議長。白き姫。

ジョン・ブルートー・スミス
仮面の怪人にして『ロサンゼルスの守護聖人』。

ウルディン
古代ガリアのカンピオーネ。

装丁／川谷デザイン

た 9-15

カンピオーネ！ XV 女神の息子

丈月 城

集英社スーパーダッシュ文庫

ISBN978-4-08-630757-4

C0193 ¥650E

9784086307574

1920193006506

定価 本体650円十税

草薙護堂は神殺しである。

アイーシャ夫人の開けた『通廊』で古代ガリアに飛ばされた護堂、エリカ、恵那。その地で出会ったカンピオーネ・ウルディンを激闘の末退けた護堂は、同じ時代に来ている剣の王・ドニを止めるため再び戦いに赴く。戦いの最中に新たなまつろわぬ神と出会う護堂。運命に導かれし邂逅が、神殺したちに史上最大の危機をもたらす……!!

Authors Introduction
著者紹介

丈月 城
14・15巻の舞台となった時代、
本編中ではあえて細かな描写をしませんでしたが、
相当に混沌とした戦国時代です。
古代ローマのより細密なうんちく話と共に、
いずれどこかでネタにしてみたい気がします。

シコルスキー
神奈川県在住のイラストレーター。AB型。
ライトノベルやソーシャルゲームのお仕事を中心に
活動させてもらっています。
好きなものは猫と映画。

スーパーダッシュ文庫 丈月 城の本

カンピオーネ！ 神はまつろわず
カンピオーネ！ Ⅱ 魔王来臨
カンピオーネ！ Ⅲ はじまりの物語
カンピオーネ！ Ⅳ 英雄と王
カンピオーネ！ Ⅴ 剣の巫女
カンピオーネ！ Ⅵ 神山飛鳳
カンピオーネ！ Ⅶ 斉天大聖
カンピオーネ！ Ⅷ 受難の魔王たち
カンピオーネ！ Ⅸ 女神再び
カンピオーネ！ Ⅹ 槍の戦神
カンピオーネ！ Ⅺ ふたつめの物語
カンピオーネ！ Ⅻ かりそめの聖夜
カンピオーネ！ XIII 南洋の姫神
カンピオーネ！ XIV 八人目の神殺し
カンピオーネ！ XV 女神の息子

丈月城

Illustration

シコルスキー

女神の息子

カピオネ！

Campione XV

アリス
ドニ
エリカ
祐理
護堂
アイーシャ
アルティオ

「ふむ……。まだ上手くは動かせぬか……」

ドニの口から、
女神アルティオの声が発せられた。
美形のくせにいつも能天気なカンビオーネの表情は、
いつになく鋭い。
正真正銘、
文句のつけどころがない美青年に見える。

「うわああああああ！」

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丈月 城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

女神の息子

Campione XV

あとがき！！

にも お買い上げいただき
ありがとうございます！

しろ

担当編集のM様
長らくお疲れ様でした！

特別出演：平たい、胴族の皆さん

Chapter 1 - Campiones in Ancient Gaul

Part 1

"In other words, reopening Aisha-neesan's corridor would be very difficult. As always, she's so adept at causing trouble for others..."

Thus sighed Saint Raffaello.

The female knight stared at the pile of English documents in her hand. This had just been delivered from the England's Witenagemot in Greenwich using the magic of [Mailing].

Recorded in these documents were the terrifying authorities of Madame Aisha.

"I have a feeling that depending on the phase of the moon, the ' corridor' could be opened using the spells of witches like me and fairy doctors. However, doing so would still require gathering dozens of experts for it to work."

Clicking her tongue with a worried expression, Liliana stared up into the night sky.

The midwinter night sky was virtually cloudless for miles. The crescent moon's brilliance was clear and dazzling.

This was the night when Kusanagi Godou, Erica Blandelli, Seishuuin Ena and Salvatore Doni had gone missing, sucked into ' Madame Aisha's corridor.'

"In that case, full preparations would require a substantial amount of time."

The beautiful face of the Japanese Hime-Miko, Mariya Yuri, was shrouded by a layer of gloomy worry.

They were currently in the garden of an ancient castle hotel, located in the Casentino area of Italy's region of Tuscany. This was where the battle against the deinonychus divine beast had taken place during the daytime.

Liliana nodded at her companion's words and sighed.

"The chances of success are definitely not high. I find it doubtful that highly suitable solutions are actually available."

They were sitting on wooden chairs at the front of the hotel garden, surrounding a round table.

Everyone was holding a copy of the documents sent from the Witenagemot. Upon hearing that one of Madame Aisha's authorities was to blame for the incident, Liliana had proceeded to contact Greenwich.

"Considering the Witenagemot, they should possess unpublicized information regarding Madame Aisha, so I tried to make a request... Looks like I made the right decision."

Liliana murmured while casting her gaze upon the documents.

Capable of opening portals to alternate realms was [Beyond the Timeless Horizon]. Bringing either healing or death was [Live or Die]. The authority of charisma, [Charm and Curse]. Furthermore, there were the authorities of [Grand Luck], [Jabberwock Slayer]...

Just the terrifying authorities known to the Witenagemot already numbered this many.

"By the way, I can't believe that those stubborn fellows would actually provide us with their precious investigation report. Isn't this classified material authorized only to those geezers, the first-class members?"

"This is all thanks to our close relationship with the former spokesperson over on that side."

Saint Raffaello remarked, quite impressed. After answering, Liliana noticed something.

Sitting next to her, Yuri was also reading the same documents, but for some reason, she seemed quite agitated.

Was there something to be concerned about? Yuri was looking up from time to time and checking out their surroundings.

"What is the matter, Mariya Yuri? Is there anything concerning? "

"Oh, not at all. I simply keep getting a strange feeling after reading these documents."

Yuri answered after getting startled by Liliana's question.

"Somehow, I keep getting the feeling that these documents would serve as an impetus for some kind of unexpected event. However, the reasons are completely unclear."

The Hime-Miko was renowned for her exceptionally potent spirit vision powers. Whenever she said "felt something," Liliana knew very well that it must not be overlooked. Did something happen? The moment Liliana braced herself, she instantly understood the reason.

Voices were heard. Two people had apparently arrived at the garden.

"Hey Paolo. Why am I getting the feeling that you don't seem happy at all about our reunion? I hope I'm just imagining things. Or am I actually correct?"

"Of course not. There's nothing of that sort, Princess."

It was the voice of a slightly displeased noblewoman. A beautiful voice, filled with masculinity, answered her respectfully.

"Encountering you again... Your knight, Paolo Blandelli, feels nothing but utmost joy. Nevertheless, the following thought does occur to me on occasion."

While speaking eloquently as befitted his identity as Erica's uncle, the knight of knights also brought up his opinion with some displeasure.

"Hoping for a noble princess to show greater prudence and restraint in her actions, I am quite positive this does not overstep a knight's bounds."

"Well, aren't you describing me like a mischievous little child? You're really quite something, Paolo."

"Then I shall be blunt, Princess. This sort of matter should not require your personal presence, should it?"

"Now that would be an absurd assertion when clearly there is such a perilous crisis here. Personally, I cannot stand back and observe while remaining uninvolved whenever acquaintances are plunged into world-level crises. Verily, apathy is the world's greatest vice. I now feel compelled to revise my opinion of you."

"Unnecessary curiosity can also be said to be one of the root causes of turmoil disrupting the world."

"Paolo, I can't believe you're still so stubbornly rigid as always."

"Please allow me to take that as a compliment, Princess Alice."

Making their arrival was the princess with the beautiful platinum-blonde hair along with the knight who seemed as strongly built as the statue of David.

Princess Alice was dressed in a light-gray fur coat with black skinny pants and a pair of boots whereas Paolo Blandelli was in a dark gray suit. However, he was holding his jacket in his left hand while his tie was slightly loosened at the collar.

As soon as the voices were heard, the arriving visitors' high stature was already readily apparent.

Let alone Liliana, even Yuri immediately stood up from her chair to bow and greet the new arrivals.

"It's been a while, Yuri and Liliana. When Liliana made a request of the Witenagemot, I was really taken by surprise. Furthermore, to think it would concern Madame Aisha!"

Alice's voice was quite cheerful and filled with a noblewoman's elegance.

Liliana instantly realized her oversight. When contacting the Witenagemot, she should have expected Alice to make an inevitable appearance.

"Currently, with three Campiones on a journey in the past, any alterations made to history would be no joking matter. One could call this quite a serious situation."

Alice was murmuring while making a face like a "noble and intelligent princess who truly worried about the crisis of the world's fate."

That said, this situation alone should not constitute enough reason for Princess Alice to rush over personally to the frontlines. Coming out to witness the commotion in spite of that could be taken as a glimpse into the princess' true personality.

"I have heard stories before, but your morbid curiosity turns out to be just as rumored."

Saint Raffaello murmured as though surprised.

Such words were permitted only because of her past illustrious accomplishments, fighting alongside the oldest Campiones, sometimes even fighting in opposition to them.

Princess Alice smiled in response to the heroic lady's remark.

"I have also heard much about the great name of Saint Raffaello. The rumors you just mentioned could very well be traced to the fabrications of a certain knight over there. Despite appearances, I actually do have sufficient cause to come forth."

In possession of a great many virtues and troublesome aspects, the princess turned her gaze towards Liliana and Yuri.

"You reported that Kusanagi-sama's time period could be seen?"

"Y-Yes. One could say so."

Yuri replied frantically to the princess' question.

"However, we are able to do no more than observe the situation on the other side of the corridor... Even details such as the time period or the location are completely unclear."

"I believe it is an era even earlier than the Middle Ages."

Liliana interjected as well. Back then, Kusanagi Godou was fighting at a place resembling a castle. It was most likely a facility built using construction techniques dating back to before the Middle Ages.

"Princess, I intend to hurry over to Godou-san and the others' side no matter what it would take."

Yuri tensed and showed a stern expression while pleading to the princess.

"Should you know how Madame Aisha's corridor could be opened, please kindly provide your instruction. I implore you—"

"Hmm... Indeed, there have been cases when third parties opened her corridors through forceful measures."

The Japanese Hime-Miko bowed her head deeply. In response, Alice made a troubled expression.

"Even if you could reach the past in this manner, it's pointless unless you can travel to the desired point in time. Just for argument's sake, suppose the corridor's other end is connected to London in 1000 CE. However, which month of that year you arrive would be completely dependent on luck..."

"Is that how it works!?"

"Also, traveling back and forth in time recklessly like this and making repeated changes to history in that era... Corrections for all that would seem to be rather difficult. In my opinion, it would be best not to try."

"Changes to history... and corrections?"

Hearing Liliana's question, the princess chuckled and smiled.

"In actual fact, a certain esteemed individual, one who is quite knowledgeable in these issues, apparently wants to meet you two."

Hearing this sudden announcement, Liliana and Yuri both could not hide their troubled expressions.

The princess' next words proceeded to make them disregard everything else.

"All sorts of difficulties are probably present in the place where this person is waiting. Since you intend to rescue Kusanagi-sama and the others, perhaps it might serve as the prime shortcut."

Liliana instantly made her decision. Together with Yuri, she nodded.

Judging from the fact that even the cautious Hime-Miko from Japan was able to decide so effortlessly without hesitation, one could tell how firmly committed she was to setting forth on the journey.

Part 2

Roughly 410 CE or so, that would be the early part of the fifth century, would it not?

Kusanagi Godou was currently stranded in this approximate time period. The location was the province of Gaul within the Western Roman Empire's territory, on the eastern most edge.

"Now that I think about it, we really did arrive in a faraway place, on a totally different level..." Muttering poignantly, he was looking out towards a grand and majestic river.

Godou was standing by the Rhine's shore.

Across the 200m wide river, the eastern barbaric lands of Germania lay further beyond. This was within the sphere of influence of the fierce equestrian tribe, the Huns.

On the other side of the great river, vast pastures stretched far and wide with lush forests up ahead in the distance.

"In the twenty-first century, this area should be near the Franco-German border..."

Godou and his entourage were currently staying at the city of Augusta Raurica.

According to Erica, this place belonged to twenty-first century Switzerland, in the vicinity of the city named Basel. Advancing north along the Rhine, one would reach the famous city of

Strasbourg on the Franco-German border. Then continuing north, there was Cologne... No wait.

These were all names of modern European cities.

Godou had heard that during the fifth century, Strasbourg was called Argentoratum while Cologne was known as Aggripina. These were all Roman names that sounded like tongue twisters.

"So you're here, Godou!"

"We're looking for you, Your Majesty!"

His two companions had arrived from the castle.

Erica and Seishuuin Ena. Both of them were riding horses and dressed in this time period's clothing.

They were wearing tunics on top, a simple type of clothing similar to t-shirts. On the bottom, they had slender pants with cloth wrapped around their waist like miniskirts, a display of women's fashion.

"Yo."

Godou waved his hand in response to Erica and Ena's calls.

Located roughly two kilometers away from the city of Augusta Raurica was a Roman army's fort.

Currently, Godou was at the midpoint between the two locations. Like the girls, he had traveled by riding a horse, which

was currently grazing by the river beside him. Living in ancient Gaul, horse riding could be used to get around various places by himself.

"What happened? Is that Uldin guy here again?"

The deadly duel against the Hun godslayer had taken place four days earlier.

Furthermore, after the intense battle ended with a ceasefire, they had received a certain report. Allegedly, Salvatore Doni had united the Frankish tribes' warriors and conquered Aggripina.

"Or is there more news on that guy Doni?"

"Mmmhmm... It's related to that as well."

"This matter must be resolved. That was what Madame Aisha said, apparently."

Ena murmured while Erica shrugged.

Godou sighed as he turned his gaze towards the two girls who were approaching on horseback.

Madame Aisha seemed quite motivated. Godou felt sorry for her but could not stop himself from imagining dark and ominous futures.

"Looks like we must ask her what she wants to do. Is she at the castle?"

"No. She went back roughly an hour ago."

"Those soldier guys pulled out a carriage and escorted her home ."

Godou answered "I see" and nodded while approaching his favorite horse.

Compared to English thoroughbreds in modern times, ancient horses were generally smaller in build. Putting his hand on the horse's neck, Godou mounted the saddle in one swift motion.

Even though he found it unfamiliar in the beginning, Godou had now gradually grown accustomed to the movement.

"So, let's head over to the church to have a look first."

Had it been the twenty-first century, they could have contacted each other by cellphone.

However, this was not possible in ancient Gaul. Having decided to pay Madame Aisha a visit at the church in the city that served as her residence, Godou instantly brought his horse to a trot.

Erica and Ena also followed on horseback. Judging from the speed, they were traveling at roughly seven or eight kilometers per hour.

Even horses would rapidly tire out if they had to gallop continuously for long periods of time. In actual fact, bicycles would be even more convenient and faster as a mode of transportation in comparison.

To begin with, the ancient world was blessed with many products of civilization.

The road being trodden by Godou and his companion's horses would be a perfect example. With a surface paved with gravel, it was quite a well-maintained road.

Like the blood vessels of a circulatory system, Roman roads formed a network within the Empire.

In addition, Augusta Raurica was a typical colonial city in the Empire, fully equipped with facilities such as aqueducts, public baths and arenas. Thousands of residences, lined up along city streets, provided an impressive view, a far cry from a description of "undeveloped land."

Riding their horses, Godou and his companions advanced slowly along this type of urban road.

"...Hmm?"

Godou felt a strange sensation. Not only could he feel himself being gazed at, but these stares also came from quite a number of people.

Checking out his surroundings from atop his horse, Godou could see the citizens of Raurica hustling and bustling about.

Of course, compared to urban centers in the twenty-first century , the volume of people would only reach the level of "a crowded shopping street" or so. But that said, there were still about a hundred people around him.

Without exception, they were all staring at Kusanagi Godou. Rather than curiosity, these people's eyes seemed more like they were filled with "awe or even fear."

"....."

While feeling strange, Godou continued to spur his horse forward.

Unlike modern streets for cars, this main road allowed horses, horse-drawn carriages, cattle, humans and more to coexist and move along at a leisurely pace. In spite of that, the people silently halted in their footsteps, turning their fearful eyes towards Kusanagi Godou while waiting quietly for the twenty-first century Japanese to pass through.

There were no obstacles in his way.

Leading Erica and Ena, Godou advanced casually along the main road.

"...What on earth is going on?"

"Well, it's because Your Majesty already fought that intense battle with Uldin-san as your opponent."

"Everyone knows all about it already. They know very well that a great warrior, rivaling Devil King Uldin in power, is present in this city and that his becoming their ruler would only be a matter of time."

"Ruler!?"

Riding on horseback, Godou was greatly shocked by the conversation that Erica and Ena were carrying out behind him.

"I have absolutely no intention of becoming someone like that!"

"The most powerful soldiers would amass influence and seize the state. That is what the present era's Roman Empire is about. Of course, there are exceptions, but those people were probably put to death by emperors who were suspicious."

"Literally a world full of turmoil, that's what it feels like."

Erica sounded exhausted while Ena nodded repeatedly to agree .

Godou was quite displeased to hear about this disturbing subject of history. But thanks to these troublesome rumors, their horses were able to move with greater efficiency. As Japanese, Godou and Ena looked quite similar to the oriental Huns and stood out considerably in the Caucasian city of Raurica.

Soon after, they arrived before a Christian church.

In this era, Christianity had already passed its "frozen period" when it was suppressed as a heretical religion and had become the

Roman Empire's state religion. Hence, churches could also be found in colonial cities of provinces such as Gaul.

After tying their horses outside the church, the trio entered the chapel.

"Hello, Kusanagi-san. I see that Erica-san and Ena-san are together with you as well. Perfect timing."

Greeting them with affectionate smiles was a young and beautiful maiden.

She possessed lustrous black hair and delicate skin with an olive complexion. Her attire consisted of a white one-piece dress from the local time period. Furthermore, wrapped around her waist was a strip of white cloth meant to be draped over one's shoulder.

Looking only seventeen-years-old, this girl was precisely Madame Aisha.

Despite appearances, she was the female Campione who had lived through eons since the nineteenth century.

"Had I known you were coming, I would have prepared lunch beforehand to welcome you all."

"You're far too kind. Oh by the way, Aisha-san."

Speaking of which, it was already lunch time. Noticing this, Godou posed a question.

His sworn elder sister, one of the Campiones from the old generation, Her Emininence Luo Hao was an expert in cooking. Perhaps Madame Aisha also happened to possess the same level of superb skill?

"Do you like to cook?"

"Hoho, I guess I can cook a bit after all. But sometimes, the food gets burnt because the fire was too hot, or I forget to cut up the vegetables, but I can assure you it's perfectly edible. I'm also quite confident in my ability to handle cooking for many guests. Please allow me to treat you all to a meal should an opportunity arise in the future♪"

"...I see."

Basically, her cooking skills were not "bad." Anyone could cook lots of food simply by preparing more ingredients. Godou refrained from making these kinds of comments while cautiously stopping his nodding.

He was already used to the abundance of Madame Aisha's questionable aspects.

"Hi Aisha-san. This is just something heard from the guys in the army."

The one striking up conversation in a familiar tone of voice was Ena, of course. Perhaps she was quite compatible with the forthright Madame Aisha? This attitude was as though they were friends already.

"Something about you wanting to meet the king who conquered the city in the north, is that really true? I must resolve this matter personally—You said something like that?"

Reportedly, Ena had heard these rumors from the soldiers in the Roman army stationed in this city.

The soldiers' expressions and words clearly expressed their worship and praise for Madame Aisha as they chatted with one another in great excitement. Aisha's charisma authority had probably made them her captives.

"Oh yes. I definitely did say that."

"Madame. This may offend you but please allow me to speak... It is my belief that this undertaking might prove to be quite difficult."

In response to the Madame's simple admission, Erica spoke respectfully.

Erica insisted on maintaining an absolute boundary between herself and Devil King Campiones, one that she would never cross no matter how much of a "good person" the other party was. Well, acting less inhibited towards Godou was fine, on the other hand...

"Sir Salvatore is a powerful individual who regards combat as his only raison d'etre. Furthermore, he is currently the [King] with the Franks under his command."

Salvatore Doni had conquered the city of Colonia Aggripina.

This was the bad news received four days earlier. In this land of ancient Gaul, Doni had made himself the great chieftain ruling over one faction of the Germanic tribes, the Franks. However, what kind of thoughts drove him to suddenly conquer one of the Roman Empire's colonial cities?

Doni was currently at Colonia Aggripina, surrounded by Franks who had gathered to worship him.

"Regarding this fact, I have already resolved myself sufficiently. No matter what, this is a job that must be done."

Madame Aisha responded decisively to Erica's petition.

Tensing her face to produce a commanding expression, she clenched her fists and declared:

"Like him, I am also a Campione who came from the future. I cannot sit idly by and allow Doni-san's high-handed behavior to continue unchecked!"

" " "....." " "

At this moment, Erica and Ena both directed gentle gazes towards Madame Aisha.

The same thought was probably occurring to Godou as well. In response to Madame Aisha's righteous indignation, they were all thinking "why on earth is she throwing herself into the line of fire? "

Godou could not help but ask:

"About the issue of disrupting the past, aren't you in the same boat as him, Aisha-san?"

"U-Umm... Well, I do confess that I am aware of the validity of that viewpoint..."

The Madame suddenly began to act flustered, shocking Godou.

"You're actually aware of it yourself!?"

"Well, after all, it's still... So, it's a very important point."

"Please elaborate."

"Well, you see, I'm already used to traveling in the past. Although there were times when I almost changed history inadvertently, but in the end, everything still turned out fine. Apart from helping people, I try my best not to do anything that interferes with history!"

"By the time an exception happens, it would already be too late to fix..."

"That won't happen. This world is more harmonious than you can imagine, Kusanagi-san. Furthermore, a maiden's heart that respects love and peace is always the strongest weapon at all times ."

In response to Madame Aisha's opportunistic views, Godou concurred indifferently.

"Is that so?"

"Yes. I have already faced those kinds of situations many times."

"In other words, you've actually changed history many times..."

"W-What are you saying? Putting that aside for now, I do think that the current situation is not too good, Kusanagi-san, what with extraneous entities like you or me intruding in this past era for example, or willful individuals like Doni-san coming here."

Understanding what Madame Aisha meant, Godou nodded.

The one who told him about history's corrective force was Madame Aisha herself. However, she was also secretly admitting that this force had its limits, was she not? Hence, she intended to personally stop Doni's atrocities before the corrective force reached its limit—

Thinking about things this way, the reasoning did seem correct indeed. As a test, Godou asked:

"But how do you plan on stopping that idiot Doni?"

"Honest sincerity. I will speak with him with my true and sincere feelings. Please leave it to me, hoho."

Godou silently stared at Madame Aisha while she chuckled and smiled.

Right now, before his eyes was probably the smiling face of someone who firmly believed in humanity's love and benevolence. Furthermore, considering how inexplicably enthusiastic she was right now, it was very well possible she could plow through the current crisis through extraordinary virtues alone.

But this time, the opponent was an absolute idiot of the super heavyweight class.

Originally, Godou was supposed to head over to the scene himself. In addition, he was going to hold the idiot down by the neck and loudly scold him "Get a grip of yourself and behave, no matter how much of an idiot you are, you idiot!"

But there were reasons why he could not set off immediately.

"Could you delay your departure briefly for now? Because I need to pay Uldin a visit to talk about this city here."

After the duel four days ago, Uldin had gone back to the forest where his stronghold was located.

With that, the dispute over the city of Augusta Raurica had been put aside temporarily. If that man were to attack while Godou was absent—That was not entirely impossible.

A truce or a rematch? The previous battle had ended ambiguously without resolution.

Godou wanted to settle these matters before confronting Doni.

"Once things are settled over here, we'll head over to that whatever Colonia city together."

"Well, if you say so, Kusanagi-san..."

Madame Aisha accepted his suggestion for now, but...

"However, I do believe we could also act separately... For example, I shall handle Doni-san while you take care of Uldin-san, Kusanagi-san..."

Seeing her murmur such dangerous words, Godou secretly motioned with his eyes. Beside him, Erica and Ena understood immediately and nodded lightly in response.

Ultimately, what they worried about was Madame Aisha running out of control.

The Madame must be watched at all times. Erica and Ena probably reached the same conclusion. On the other hand, completely unaware of such thoughts in Godou's mind, the problematic woman suddenly changed the topic.

"Oh right, by the way, speaking of Doni-san, there's something quite interesting."

"Something related to that idiot?"

"Yes. Recently, a prophesy has started circulating—the appearance of a hero wielding a sword of light, someone who will defeat a certain Devil King Salvatore of the north."

Prophesy. Godou was dumbstruck by this unexpected term.

In response, Madame Aisha smiled mischievously and continued to supplement her explanation.

"These rumors started circulating in town recently over the past few days. Although it's unclear who started it, the rumor has suddenly spread everywhere all at once. Have you heard of it?"

"This is my first time."

"It can't be helped. Ever since the battle ended four days ago, we were either cooped up in the castle or running all over the place to handle the aftermath. However, this rumor really is quite interesting."

After Godou commented, Erica chuckled and smiled beside him .

"Descriptions about the mysterious warrior leading the Franks would just be hearsay, but calling Sir Salvatore a Devil King is surprisingly accurate. Looks like rumors should not be overlooked. "

"Oh, come to think of it, Ena also heard other rumors just now."

Although Ena was feared in town as the "dangerous female warrior of the Huns," thanks to her straightforward personality, she was still able to converse amiably with soldiers in the Roman army.

This was apparently news she obtained from them. Godou asked:

"What is it?:

"The terrible insect, Kusanagi Godou, hanging around Aisha-san should just die already from divine retribution. He deserves to die. Also, something about an older brother."

"...You really heard that from those people in the army?"

"Yes. Your Majesty is on such good terms with Aisha-san that many people are quite jealous apparently."

Ena smiled wryly while reporting.

This made perfect sense. Due to the charisma authority, the soldiers in the army were virtually worshiping Madame Aisha like an idol.

Nevertheless, Godou still felt perplexed.

"But what's with the final part? Older brother?"

"Oh, I think it's something I said recently that got spread around ."

Seeing Godou ask Ena, Madame Aisha interjected.

"When asked about my relationship with Kusanagi-san, I answered 'He's something like an older brother to me.'"

"...Uh. Please don't make statements that sound like a female idol's attempts to hide scandals about fellow celebrities."

Despite not being exactly up to date on celebrity gossip, Godou was positive that no celebrity had ever succeeded in dispelling scandals by describing someone as like an older brother.

The question could probably be dodged using superior methods. Saying that, Godou sighed and raised another question.

"No matter how you look at it, isn't it impossible for me to be older than Aisha-san—"

"Nothing of that sort! So long as I don't reveal anything, I'm frequently mistaken for a teenager. I'll have you know that even my skin is perfectly smooth and tender!"

"This isn't about age in appearance. Rather, I'm talking about mental and actual age."

"B-Besides, didn't you fight for my sake earlier? If that can't be described as an older brother's love for a sister, what else would you call it!?"

"No, it looked that way just by coincidence..."

The two Campiones, one new and one old, began to quarrel inside this early Christian church. In light of their titles as godslaying Devil Kings, it was quite a harmonious scene to behold .

Nevertheless, Godou thoroughly knew from the depths of his heart that these peaceful times were not going to persist indefinitely.

Part 3

Reportedly, marching from Augusta Raurica (modern-day northern Switzerland) to Colonia Aggripina (midwestern Germany) would take Roman infantry twenty days.

Spending roughly six hours a day on marching, the rest of the time was spent on setting up camp and resting.

For armed infantry regiments, this was apparently the highest level possible.

"However, traveling by wheeled transport—an automobile rather than a horse-drawn carriage—would only take half a day or so."

"Using that to judge the distance, it's roughly four to five hundred kilometers?"

Erica and Godou chatted while their bodies rocked on horseback.

A great river was flowing not too far from the road where they were moving along. The Rhine.

Since Augusta Raurica and Colonia Aggripina were both Roman colonial cities that were built on the Rhine's shores, one

could naturally travel from the former to the latter by following the river downstream.

However, Godou and Erica's horses were traveling towards a destination that was upstream instead.

After visiting Madame Aisha's church the day before, they had immediately set off. Camping overnight once, they had resumed their horseback journey early this morning. The current time was roughly noon or so.

"Even this kind of traveling, I seem to be gradually getting used to it..."

"Is that so? I find it slightly boring without encountering any towns and villages along the way."

"Hey you, in the past, didn't you once say 'Since we're going traveling anyway, we might as well go to a mansion on a remote island that takes a day to reach' or something like that?"

"That's because it's the kind of place where locked room mysteries seem likely to happen. Positively thrilling, wouldn't you agree?"

Then again, even without riding horses, Erica and Ena were still able to run at extraordinary speeds.

A method of running that was said to combine magic with martial arts. However, it was also supposed to drain stamina rapidly and was hence unsuitable for journeys spanning multiple

days. Life in ancient Gaul frequently required them to depend on horses.

In any case, the two of them made their way along the road on horseback.

This road was laid down along the Rhine, passing through what were basically vast open plains. Forests were commonplace, but the terrain lacked variation.

Riding ancient horses, Godou and Erica advanced steadily.

Approximately half a month had passed since they first arrived in ancient Gaul. During this time, getting familiar with horses through frequent contact, Godou finally managed to reach a level considered "capable of horseback riding."

(Of course, difficult techniques, such as rushing straight down a steep slope, were still beyond him.)

Rather than having innate talent for riding horses, it would be better to say that he simply grew used to things.

Fortunately, Godou possessed stamina and an incomparably sturdy body that made all this possible. Thanks to that, he never experienced the suffering that novice riders frequently went through, such as aching bottoms and backs or abrasive wounds on the knees or under the thighs.

"We should settle things here as quickly as possible and get back to Seishuuin's side. That idiot Doni must be taken care of as soon as possible..."

Godou muttered.

Ena was assigned the task of monitoring "a certain person requiring special attention."

"Hey Godou, impulsive behavior such as taking this opportunity to steal a march would be unladylike, wouldn't it? But then again, I believe that there are times when we must prepare ourselves to fall into path of evil as a couple, don't you agree?"

"I have absolutely no intention of that, so listen to me and continue traveling obediently..."

The slightly familiar forest was already entering into view.

This was their third visit to Uldin's forest where his dragons inhabited.

After entering the forest, Erica used divination magic to determine which direction to take. Walking in the direction indicated by the dangling pocket watch, they encountered *Deinonychuses*—nimble, bipedal, carnivorous dinosaur-type divine beasts—several times along the way.

Not long after that, they arrived at the site of a former Roman army encampment by the riverside, now serving as Uldin's fortress .

"Yo comrade. I never expected us to meet again so soon."

Godou's arrival had apparently been reported already.

The Hun godslayer smiled cheerfully and waited at the fortress' entrance.

"Anyway, let's have a welcoming feast first. Take your time and enjoy."

"I'm just here to talk this time. Spare me the feast, let's start now. "

Godou answered the godslayer who resembled him in appearance.

Uldin laughed heartily and strode towards a mansion that was once the Roman army's headquarters. Godou and Erica spurred their horses and followed after him.

Ten minutes later, Godou and Uldin were facing each other in a hall inside the headquarters.

On Godou's side was Erica while Uldin had his two wives, Ruska and Clotilde.

"My purpose here today is..."

"Hold on, Kusanagi Godou. May I interrupt slightly?"

As soon as Godou spoke, Ruska immediately interrupted. Like Uldin, she was also descended from the Hunnic tribes of the orient . A beauty with soft, sleek, black hair at shoulder length.

"Recently... I keep getting this unpleasant feeling for some reason."

"Okay."

Was she unused to making long-winded speeches? Ruska's explanation was slightly ambiguous.

Godou answered simply then braced himself. Ruska possessed excellent spirit vision and was a witch of this era. This could not possibly be a simple chat—Godou concluded.

Unfortunately, Godou's premonition was right on target.

"Probably... No, the reason surely stems from you. Kusanagi Godou, that woman dressed in white, as well as Salvatore—The godslayers who came from far away on the other side."

"What's bad about these few's presence?"

Uldin interjected with interest. Ruska nodded slightly.

"Very bad... How should I put this? The feeling is too many. And too early."

Godou exchanged a glance with Erica beside him.

He understood what Ruska said by too many. Including Uldin, there were already four Campiones gathered in this region. Definitely too many. However—

"What does 'too early' mean, Ruska?"

This question came from Clotilde. The tall, female warrior was a user of ancient runic magic.

Due to being indoors, she had taken off the feather-decorated helmet she normally wore all the time. As a result, her head of beautiful blonde hair was open to view.

"Sorry, I'm unable to explain clearly... It's just a feeling that these conditions were originally not supposed to be fulfilled until decades later. Somehow, that's what I keep feeling."

Whenever an outstanding spirit vision user "kept feeling" something, it was not a matter to be ignored.

Godou and his companions knew this very well. He could not help but look at the Italian girl beside him, only to see her in deep thought.

"Too many Campiones... Originally supposed to be decades later..."

"I keep getting this feeling. If things were allowed to progress as they are, the situation would become quite bad. For example, something that was not supposed to happen will occur, that's the kind of feeling."

Without ignoring Erica's murmurs just now, Ruska ended the conversation with an ominous oracle.

As expected, the matter of Doni must be resolved as quickly as possible so that everyone could return to the modern age together. Godou nodded to himself on this point and bowed his head deeply.

"Thank you very much, Ruska-san. I will take your words into consideration."

"No need to thank me. After all, this will probably be a calamity that will befall us as well."

"Us as well?"

Hearing his wife's words, Uldin laughed with joy.

"In that case, then the two of us, comrades that we are, should ally to engage the enemy. An alliance forged between us two could very well be an invincible army."

"If only that were true..."

Uldin had apparently not given up on Kusanagi Godou.

Why don't you be king in my place? Recalling this invitation, Godou retorted "stop deciding on an alliance without my consent."

Next to Godou, Erica stopped pondering and immediately looked up.

"If that's the case, King Uldin, I was wondering whether you've been actively working towards making that alliance a reality and if you intend to build a new relationship with Kusanagi Godou?"

Faced with Erica's eloquent words, Uldin muttered.

"New relationship?"

"You proposed previously to have Kusanagi Godou join you under your banner. However, judging from the fact the two of you fought to a draw in the battle a few days ago, it is readily apparent that both of you possess equal power as godslayers. In that case, why not establish an alliance of equals to become kings ruling the land of Gaul together—Does that sound agreeable to you?"

Nothing less expected from Erica. She began to converse eloquently in a continuous flow.

By having Uldin agree to a truce before they headed over to Doni, the city of Augusta Raurica and its surroundings could be assured. This was the purpose behind the current visit.

One of Godou's reasons for choosing Erica over Ena to accompany him was for the sake of these negotiations.

Meanwhile, Uldin laughed generously after hearing Erica's proposal.

"I see. After all, there's that Salvatore someone rousing the Frankish warriors in the north as well as the unknown calamity Ruska mentioned. Oh well, even without gaining a king as my

proxy, consolidating friendship between comrades is still to my advantage."

"Exactly as you say."

"However, forming an alliance requires assurance."

Uldin was right. Verbal agreements were quite fragile and easily revoked.

The risk factor was that while Godou and his friends were setting off for Colonia Agrippina, his ally Uldin would take the opportunity to attack Augusta Raurica.

This was also what Erica worried about.

'Letting Ena-san or me serve a hostage by Uldin's side while having Ruska or Clotilde placed by Godou's side in exchange—This would be the most likely compromise.'

Erica's earlier prediction proved to be correct.

Uldin raised the same issue but turned his gaze towards Godou instead of Erica.

"How about this, comrade? Let me ask a question first."

"What?"

"Do you have a daughter?"

"H-How is that even possible!?"

As soon as he answered, Godou realized something.

In the ancient world, it was nothing surprising to have children even at the age of a first year high schooler at sixteen. But why would Uldin ask such a question?

Without noticing the doubts Godou harbored, the Hun godslayer continued speaking aloofly.

"Then what about sisters?"

"I do have a younger sister. But why are you asking about this?"

"Hey comrade, you're pretty slow here. So that I can take her as a wife or a concubine, of course."

"Wife!?"

Greatly stunned, Godou realized. In other words, a political marriage. The man, who had just proposed to wed the fourteen-year-old Kusanagi Shizuka, laughed with his face filled with joy.

"If your sister is the kind of woman I like, beautiful and strong-willed, that'll be the best. But our alliance of comrades is more important than that. Regarding this, much needs to be discussed—"

Cough cough. Uldin was interrupted by coughing in the middle of his sentence, but it was not his own.

Instead, it was Clotilde standing behind him. Normally, she always kept a serious demeanor with little variation in expression. However, surfacing on her wise and beautiful face was a rarely seen smile like a blooming flower.

Be that as it may, her eyes were not smiling. In this manner, Uldin's blonde wife spoke up:

"Uldin-sama's joke has gone slightly too far. Please allow me to answer instead as his wife. Kusanagi-sama, Lady Erica, please step this way."

"Yes. Uldin, could you come over here and we'll have a brief word?"

"What are you two talking about? This has already reached the point of impertinence—"

Seeing Clotilde head towards the great hall's exit, Ruska coldly declared to her womanizing husband. The man in question regretfully expressed his dissatisfaction.

Ruska walked over to the depths of the hall and took down a spear from the wall.

Uldin stopped talking at the sight of that. Seizing this opportunity, Clotilde immediately said:

"Well then, Kusanagi-sama, please follow me outside."

"Oh, okay..."

What sort of conversation and quarrel was going to take place next between the husband and wife?

Despite feeling quite curious, in the end, Godou still decided to follow the ancient blonde beauty and leave obediently.

Leaving the great hall with Erica together in a panic, Godou arrived at the courtyard. While walking through a colonnade, Clotilde spoke up:

"Worry not. After all, we owe you a favor, Kusanagi-sama. Just leave the matter of the alliance to me. It looks like there will continue to be many opportunities when punishment must be administered to our husband."

"O-Okay."

"Ruska-sama and I both cherish how fate has brought us to cross paths with you, Kusanagi-sama."

"That's wonderful, Clotilde. In that case, please do not hesitate to ask should you have any need for Kusanagi Godou's power in the future."

Erica replied in a noblewoman's tone of voice to the woman walking in front.

"Just contact me or Ena-san and we'll provide the best assistance we can offer."

"Much appreciated, Lady Erica. Well then, please feel free to let us know if Uldin's power is needed as well. We are all women in similar situations, so please allow me to offer the most of my meager assistance."

"Thank you, hoho. Let's continue to be friends."

"Of course. In my view, encountering you has brought me unexpected fortune."

"..."

The problem of assurance for the alliance was easily resolved by feelings of solidarity between the ladies.

Oh well, considering that guy Uldin's personality, ignoring his wives' wrath to attack "Kusanagi Godou's capital" was probably highly unlikely.

Nevertheless, Godou still felt quite complicated.

As much as he would like to object loudly to being described as the same type of person as Uldin, who loved women to a pathological degree, Godou's instincts warned him that voicing his opinion would surely draw vehement accusations from the female faction, hence he kept silent throughout.

"The discussion concluded much faster than expected, how wonderful."

"I guess..."

Godou and Erica were riding on horseback again. The pair had just departed from Uldin's fortress and passed through the forest where the *Deinonychus* divine beasts lurked.

Their next move was to return to the main road and start on the return journey.

The sun was still high up in the sky. Probably around noon. Thinking they should get back to Augusta Raurica as quickly as possible, Godou decided to hurry while it was still daylight at a sustainable rate without causing the horses to collapse from exhaustion. Next, they had to keep a close eye on Madame Aisha's movements while heading north where Doni was located.

Just as he was about to propose hurrying up on their way, Godou noticed something.

Sitting on the chestnut horse, Erica was making a pondering expression.

"What's the matter?"

"Just now, Ruska mentioned about the occurrence of something not supposed to happen, right?"

"That thing, yeah. What does it mean?"

"A simple interpretation would probably be the changing of the original history... Basically something like that."

Erica allowed her favorite horse to trot slowly while she murmured.

"If 'too many' refers to the Campiones, then what about 'too soon'? Could it be that another three Campiones are not supposed to come into existence until decades later if history is correct?"

"Three of our kind will be born in this era, here in Gaul?"

"Yes."

Faced with Erica's unusual speculation, Godou could not help but shake his head.

"That's not very likely, right?"

"But Godou, I have mentioned it before, right? In the same way that wine has good vintage years, there are periods when a rare number of Campiones are born."

Godou recalled that seemed to be something she had said before the decisive battle against Verethragna on the island of Sardinia.

While Godou was reminiscing, Erica continued:

"Even if you consider the twenty-first century where we came from, there are already seven kings gathered, right?"

"Now that you mention it, that's indeed the case... Speaking of that Uldin guy, he also mentioned seeing other peers—godslayers like him."

"Although the exact number is unclear, multiple Campiones are supposed to exist in the current time period."

Nodding in acknowledgement, Godou was struck by further questions.

"But what kind of calamity is triggered when there are too many Campiones?"

"Who knows. Well, the mere existence of five or six godslaying Devil Kings is already enough to make a total mess of the world."

Just as the casual conversation turned towards a slightly depressing subject...

Godou was startled by a sudden feeling of weight in his right arm. This was the arm where the divine sword Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was kept. Was Susanoo's former favorite sword trying to say something?

"What's the matter, did something happen?"

'The miko sends a message...'

After Godou asked, he heard an exhausted "voice" answering from his right arm.

Although Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was a self-aware divine sword, it was completely indifferent to everything apart from battle. One of the few exceptions was the "Hime-Miko of the Sword," Seishuuin Ena.

She was formerly in possession of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Even now, the divine sword still protected her.

Precisely due to this relationship, Ena would often wield Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi on Godou's behalf. Even separated by

great distances, she could still communicate with the divine sword's consciousnss—

"Is there an emergency!?"

'The target under surveillance escaped... The transmitted thoughts report this matter...'

Hearing the divine sword report reluctantly, Godou was greatly surprised.

This was the second reason for leaving Ena behind at Augusta Raurica. Even separated by physical distance, she was still able to contact Godou by relying on Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

However, the target under surveillance—Madame Aisha—had escaped, unbelievably.

Seishuuin Ena possessed sharp instincts and exceptional agility. So long as she pursued in earnest, Ena was supposed to be able to capture even wild beasts escaping in the mountains.

How on earth did Madame Aisha escape from Ena's surveillance?

While Godou felt baffled, Erica sighed beside him.

"Looks like we underestimated Madame Aisha too much. What on earth is going to happen next?"

Occupying the lands of the north were Salvatore Doni and the Frankish tribes. Madame Aisha had already set off towards that place with a head start on Kusanagi Godou.

A mad feast was staged on the Rhine basin, a gathering of modern and ancient Campiones.

Apparently, the main event was finally coming to an official start.

Chapter 2 - Journey to Colonia Agrippina

Part 1

Madame Aisha was the godslayer who had traveled from the twenty-first century to this era.

Today, she was still dressed in the usual attire she had worn ever since arriving in ancient Gaul—the white overcoat with the long robe that resembled a one-piece dress.

The bright and sunny weather of spring was quite comfortable, sending Aisha's spirits to a crescendo.

Blowing across the water, the favorable wind was smooth and gentle.

Driven by this wind, the merchant's ship that Aisha had boarded was sailing downstream along the Rhine, towards the north of the Roman province of Gaul.

Judging by modern sensibilities, the ship would be roughly " twice the size of a yacht or thereabouts."

"The people of this ship are so friendly and helpful."

Whether the ship's owner or the wheat traders on board, everyone treated Aisha very nicely.

Four days earlier, at the pier of Augusta Raurica, Aisha had asked them if she could hitch a ride. They agreed readily.

During the daytime, the ship would sail along the river, blown downstream by the wind.

At night, she would wrap herself in a blanket and sleep on the ship while it was moored along towns by the shore.

Then on the fourth day of the journey, during the daytime, the ship arrived at the Roman colonial city of Mogontiacum.

The ship was only supposed to unload merchandise here and then return upstream to the city of Raurica.

There was still far to go before reaching her destination of Colonia Agrippina, which lay much further north.

Madame Aisha disembarked amidst the merchants' smiling farewells.

Everyone saw her off with warm words and smiles.

Finding the world full of benevolence, Aisha felt "warmth" in her heart.

(In actual fact, this was all due to Aisha's slight invocation of her charisma authority when she first made her request with a smile. Perhaps their friendly behavior did not stem from pure benevolence, nevertheless, Madame Aisha had no wish of being a pessimist who refuted these people's kindness. She believed that humans must live by supporting one another.)

After disembarking, Aisha first went to find a meal.

Her special skills included being able to sleep soundly no matter where she slept and finding all food delicious no matter what she ate. These two special skills were probably what allowed her to live her life completely stress free regardless of location.

On this occasion, she chose a cheap restaurant nearby. Her order consisted of some slightly hard bread and vegetable soup flavored with pepper. Aisha thoroughly enjoyed these trivial and ordinary pleasures.

"Next, I should find my next ship."

Leaving the restaurant, Aisha made her way to the pier again. The Rhine had been used extensively for water transport since antiquity and many ships were moored at Mogontiacum's pier.

"Who should I ask...?"

She murmured to herself as she looked around the pier. Instead of searching for friendly-looking sailors, she was doing the opposite. Since people always said yes no matter whom she asked, Aisha found these situations quite troubling instead. In actual fact, there was no one nearby who would reject her requests—

"Come to think of it, I wonder if Ena-san and the others are okay?"

Perhaps due to arriving at the pier, she recalled what had happened back when she first set off.

Even at the city of Augusta Raurica, she had selected a suitable ship to board in the same manner. Seizing the opportunity in the absence of the caring Kusanagi Godou who had a tendency to nag, she had departed on her journey alone.

At that time, Ena was apparently following Aisha.

Not long after the ship left the city of Raurica, a second ship following behind suddenly suffered from a fallen mast and the misfortune of a breached hull. The passengers instantly set themselves to throwing water out of the ship and seemed to be in quite a state of panic.

Aisha had clearly witnessed Ena's speechless appearance at the time.

"Putting me under surveillance and not letting me travel, seriously, that Kusanagi-san. Is he really that worried about me? That's a bit excessively protective of him..."

Last time at Raurica, a battle had taken place between Uldin and him.

At the time, Kusanagi Godou had come forward to fight in Aisha's defense, risking his life and exhibiting benevolence and courage. He was definitely quite a kindhearted youth.

Nevertheless, whether surveillance or his caring ways, both were still too excessive.

The charisma power did not affect Kusanagi Godou who was likewise a godslayer. The chivalry and spirit of self-sacrifice in protecting Aisha all came from the youth's own free will.

Suddenly, Aisha was taken aback with surprise.

"Could it be, no way, is he actually... in love with me!?"

Aisha wondered while wandering aimlessly at the pier.

Like a strike of lightning, the shock caused her heart to waver, making her body sway unsteadily. Leaning against the railing by the river, she finally managed to stabilize herself.

"Is protecting me a means to hide his shyness? Or is he unable to face his own feelings honestly...? It should be one or the other, right...?"

In that case, everything made logical sense. Aisha seemed to have glimpsed the light of truth.

"B-But Kusanagi-san has two lovers already. Despite clearly making righteous speeches, he turns out to be no better than Uldin-san. Quite an unfaithful womanizer... Without mincing words, he would be human scum of a slightly silly variety..."

Shocked by the truth she had divined, Aisha felt her body temperature rising as though she had a fever. She kept murmuring :

"But he risked his life for me... Also, despite putting up such a serious front all the time, who knows what scandals are secretly circulating about him and any number of ladies. This is attractive in itself, a bit of a bad boy feel—Oh no! This is no good at all!"

Aisha's mind was instantly plunged into all sorts of thoughts. Disapproval and affirmation clashed intensely, erupting sparks in a battle of light and darkness.

"This won't do, Aisha. If I allow myself to be carried away by these emotions and accept him, surely I'll be the one crying in the end, at an older age to boot... Of course, I can still pass as his younger sister perfectly plausibly, yes, a very lively and energetic younger sister..."

"Excuse me, Aisha-san?"

"Oh no, I feel like I'm seeing Kusanagi-san's face before me when my thoughts are with him... If I don't calm myself down a bit more..."

"No actually, I am right in front of you, in the flesh—Can you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you—Wah!?"

Aisha was so shocked she fell backwards.

Standing before her and watching in surprise were Kusanagi Godou, Erica Blandelli and Seishuuin Ena. Unbeknownst to Aisha, they had somehow gathered here already.

"K-Kusanagi-san, did you overhear what I was saying just now!?"

"Just the last sentence. After going through all the trouble and finding you murmuring to yourself by the river, I was originally thinking of capturing you... Were you trying to say something?"

"Pay no mind to it! They were simply murmurs, a maiden's private thoughts!"

In an effort to conceal the heavy pulsation in her heart, Aisha yelled loudly.

"B-But anyway, how did you catch up to me, Kusanagi-san?"

"Like you, Aisha-san, we came by ship."

Having traveled downstream on the Rhine by ship, Godou answered Madame Aisha's question.

It was the only small-size sailing ship that was about to depart, similar to a yacht in size and appearance. Given a favorable wind, it was capable of moving rapidly across water.

With an estimated speed of twenty knots, it was comparable to the legal speed limit of automobiles.

However, having grown accustomed to walking and riding horses, Godou found it quite fast. Currently on board were Godou, Madame Aisha, Erica and Ena.

"I was near that Uldin guy's forest when I heard about Aisha-san going missing, so I went and asked that guy to borrow a ship."

"Then through various means, we managed to catch up to you, Madame."

Godou replied, followed by Erica who reported in a courteous tone of voice.

Not too long ago, Godou had also borrowed a ship from Ruska and Clotilde to sail downstream along the Rhine.

Like last time, Clotilde had bestowed a water protection spell at their departure. This allowed them to travel much faster than an ordinary ship.

Furthermore, Godou and Erica both had excellent night vision.

This allowed them to take turns watching over the ship as they advanced during nighttime, proceeding to pick up Ena at Raurica and chase after Madame Aisha who had set off first. As an extra precaution, Erica had taken a hair from Madame Aisha to use for search magic, thereby allowing them to close in substantially and avoid having to check ships one by one.

"No other way, I suppose..."

Madame Aisha apparently gave up. She sighed and said:

"I was originally thinking of leaving you behind, Kusanagi-san who is slightly too naggy, so that I may negotiate with Doni-san first. I'll give up on that now. So let the four of us do our best together from now on!"

"Agreed. But I don't really nag that much."

Still getting slightly strung along by Aisha's pace, Godou objected indifferently.

"I just speak a bit of common sense, that's all."

"You're saying annoying things again... But I understand. Kusanagi-san, you feel so concerned about me that you can't help yourself... Isn't that right?"

"Well, that's because like that idiot Doni, you're someone I really need to pay attention to."

In a careless moment, Godou said something he should not have disclosed in front of this centenarian-plus woman.

Unlike her godslayer peer, Godou's sworn sister Luo Cuilian, Madame Aisha was quite cheerful and candid in behavior and personality alike. Even worse, she was quite prone to gossiping as a result of this personality.

Meanwhile, for some reason Godou could not fathom, Madame Aisha was going "I knew it..." and nodding to herself.

Then looking up, she secretly glanced at Godou's face.

"But Aisha-san, there's something Ena doesn't understand."

While Madame Aisha was acting suspiciously, Ena asked incredulously.

"In order to chase after your ship, Aisha-san, Ena also hitched a ride on another ship that was setting sail, but gave up when a hole opened up in the ship's hull."

"Ah, so it really happened."

"The next ship taken was suddenly beached. Then the one after that was unable to set sail because of the commotion from an old man's stomach ache. If they're all coincidence, Ena thinks that's a bit excessive..."

Using Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi as a medium, Ena had contacted Godou.

After picking up the raven-haired Hime-Miko who was stranded and waiting at the riverside near Augusta Raurica, Godou had heard about this matter. Due to three inexplicable instances of trouble, she had been unable to tail Aisha.

One could not help but suspect an element of human intervention in three successive instances of misfortune.

Presumably, Madame Aisha must have done something? For example, little tricks of magic...

"Indeed, it cannot be said to be pure coincidence. I am truly sorry."

As expected, Madame Aisha answered in an apologetic tone of voice.

She clasped her hands together before her chest, making a pose like a pious nun in prayer.

"Actually, I was praying before boarding the ship: Please protect me during this period when I am heading over to visit Doni-san and guide him towards the path of benevolence so as to prevent more people from suffering."

"Praying... Do you believe in some kind of religion, Madame?"

Feeling surprised, Erica interjected. Presumably she found it quite shocking for a godslayer to use the word "praying."

"Or perhaps, you believe in a deity of some place?"

"Oh no. Actually, there was one time over in China when I had no choice but to defeat a benevolent guardian of the populace."

" " "....." " "

Confronted with this sudden confession, Godou, Erica and Ena exchanged glances with one another.

In other words, it was nothing as half-baked as "little tricks of magic."

"As a result, I obtained an authority of fortune's blessing. It is quite an insignificant power, only taking effect to help me accomplish my task whenever I vow to do good..."

"F-Fortune's blessing huh..."

Normally fazed by nothing, Ena could only mutter "I surrender" in response.

Most likely, she never would have imagined that such occurrences were actually the result of a godslayer's authority.

"So in trying to hinder Aisha-san, Ena encountered weird events ..."

"Yes. I pray not to any god but towards my own authority. — When time is not yet ripe for good to result, even the benevolent shall encounter misfortune, when time is ripe for good to result, fortune shall come to pass, let good be rewarded with fortune and evil shall reap what they sow..."

At this moment, the sound of rumbling thunder could be heard.

"It was sunny up until just now..."

Godou looked up into the air. Before he knew it, the thunderclouds had already spread far and wide, completely darkening the sky.

"Madame Aisha, is this caused by that authority?"

Erica suddenly realized something and asked the terrifying female Campione.

"Taking effect over the duration it takes to bring a good deed to fruition—In other words, right now, while making her way towards Sir Salvatore, the power of fortune is still protecting the Madame!?"

"...Oh, now that you mention it, that's true indeed."

" " "!?" " "

The Madame answered readily in the affirmative. Godou and his friends were shocked.

Within the mere time span of the earlier exchange, a great rainstorm had already started its downpour. Striking the people and the Rhine's surface alike, the raindrops actually hurt. In modern parlance, it would be a guerrilla rainstorm.

Finally, a strong gale began to blow in transverse while lightning struck down incessantly from the sky.

In merely four or five minutes, a storm had descended. Naturally, faced with a great rainstorm, the Rhine shook Godou's small sailing ship violently. The intensity of the ship's rocking was undoubtedly beyond what amusement park rides could offer.

"Hurry and get ashore, we must get back onto solid ground!"

"Th-This storm is on a totally different level compared to the accidents that hindered Ena!"

"Indeed, it must be because of Kusanagi-san. As expected, when a godslayer caught up to me, ordinary trials and misfortunes are not enough."

"So, because I'm getting in your way, Aisha-san, that's what's causing this storm!?"

"When clearly Aisha-san is getting swept up in it as well?"

"This sometimes happens when I use this power. Someone's fortune becomes another's misfortune. Fortune adhered to misfortune, misfortune lurking amidst fortune. Fortune and misfortune would summon each other. Perhaps this is the truth that this world conveys..."

On the river's surface, scoured by wind and waves, the water was billowing turbulently. As a result of the heavy rain, everyone became completely soaked.

Only Madame Aisha was calmly explaining away.

As the price(?) for using the authority of fortune, she was probably well-accustomed to getting swept into sudden misfortune and calamities.

In contrast, Erica, Ena and Godou were showing signs of anxiety. In any case, they started taking action to counter their desperate situation.

But it was already too late.

Produced by the strong gale, giant waves made the ship's body turn a hundred and eighty degrees—They capsized.

Naturally, all four of them were tossed into the raging winds and turbulent waters in the middle of the Rhine.

Part 2

Liliana Kranjcar was a witch with outstanding talent.

Being only a teenager, she had yet to reach the level of top experts.

But in this age, she undoubtedly held outstanding promise, a rare prodigy whom everyone expected to eventually reach the pinnacle along this path.

Furthermore, currently in front of Liliana was the "top expert" who could serve as her role model.

Princess Alice—the princess who stood at the pinnacle of the heaven-oriented system of witchcraft.

As Europe's most powerful miko and highest-ranking witch, she had brought Liliana and Mariya Yuri to meet "a certain person who wanted to see them."

The trip was a bit different from expected.

Their current location was a hotel that had been converted from an ancient medieval Italian castle.

Climbing a long and spiral staircase, Alice led Liliana and Yuri to an observation room at the highest and fifth floor. One of the walls was made of glass, providing a view of the "outside" scenery.

This ancient castle was situated in the Casentino area, a region of forest designated as a national park.

With trees extending all the way to the horizon, the land was covered white in snow that had fallen a few days prior. Meanwhile , the bright light of the crescent moon illuminated the greenery and silver-white snow down below.

Such scenery of fantasy was visible from this observation room.

"Come to think of it, aren't you also my junior, Liliana?"

"Yes, although I am still in training."

Standing under the moonlight streaming in through the window, the princess asked. Liliana answered concisely.

This was not because she was unused to interacting with fellow witches, for Liliana would often address her master or seniors as " auntie" or "sister." Nevertheless, Liliana was also a knight at the same time and did not intend to address a noble princess with too much familiarity.

On the other hand, Alice smiled and accepted Liliana's stubborn adherence to etiquette, then spoke:

"Wonderful, then there's no issue even if I verbally pass along the words of witches. Liliana and Yuri, please note that you must carefully keep what you hear here a secret, okay?"

Alice brought her index finger to her lips to make a gesture of confidentiality.

Then Yuri, the Japanese Hime-Miko, bowed apologetically.

"Excuse me, Princess... In that case, would it be better if I took my leave?"

"Nothing to worry about, Yuri, so please remain present. You can be considered the cousin of us witches. Furthermore, apart from the witches, a select few people are privy to this secret as well ."

The witch, who stood at the pinnacle of the heaven-oriented system, smiled mischievously.

"Even the Witenagemot's Diogenes Club is also a part of the select few in the know. There's also North America's premier fairy doctor—the elderly gentleman who assists a certain Devil King."

Indeed as expected. Liliana nodded silently. Princess Alice intended to share secret knowledge that was only passed verbally even between high-ranking witches.

Right now, Alice was using summoning magic to call forth a perfume bottle into her right hand.

She swiftly waved this tiny bottle towards Liliana and Yuri. A refreshing floral scent entered their nostrils.

Having smelled this fragrance before, Liliana and Yuri were shocked. They remembered the aroma from an incident concerning a certain divine sword that counted as part of Japan's national treasure.

"O skylark, take me to the furthest reaches of the clouds, your song resounding in the heavens between the clouds, leading me together in flight—"

As Liliana watched in shock, Princess Alice chanted spell words .

Considering this in conjunction with the magical presence that exuded accordingly, Liliana remembered.

Unmistakable. The princess was using "that witchcraft." Liliana was certain. Before her eyes, the observation room's glass glowed brightly from the moonlight. In the following instant, her entire view was taken over by white light...

Once the white light dissipated, Liliana found herself standing on a cliff by the sea. Looking down at the foot of the cliff, she could see raging waves crashing against the rocks. Also, the sky was purple.

Mariya Yuri and the princess were next to her.

Yuri gulped. From the sight of the purple sky alone, it was already obvious that this was no ordinary place.

"Sure enough, the Netherworld... Princess, you used a spell to cross over to the Netherworld, yes?"

"Yes, that's right, although we tend to call this realm the 'Astral Plane.'"

Yuri confirmed with the princess who answered with a wink.

The Netherworld, a domain outside of the mortal realm.

An alternate dimension where the mind and ectoplasm ranked higher than material substance. It was said that Japanese wizards called it the Netherworld while Chinese Daoists referred to it as Youmingjie or Youjie in short. Known to Persian wizardry as the Menog, Greek mysticism called it the Idea Realm, etc.

Heretic Gods seemed to call it the [Boundary of Life and Immortality].

The perfume the princess had released just now was a secret elixir concocted to help human bodies adjust to the Netherworld's air. During the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi incident, Liliana had also prepared the same elixir to send Yuri to the Netherworld.

The princess did not use it on herself, most likely because there was no need to.

Instead of using her physical body, the frail Princess Alice apparently went outdoors by sending her spirit body "outside."

Essentially, the princess in front of Liliana and Yuri's eyes was nothing more than a projection, something akin to a ghost. There was no issue of spirit bodies needing to adjust to the Astral Plane.

"The person who wants to see us turns out to be in the Netherworld huh..."

"Not exactly? You'll understand quicker if you see with your own eyes. Let's hurry over to the meeting place."

After answering Yuri's query, the princess closed her eyes. The surrounding environment instantly changed.

A Buddha statue stood upright in the middle of a cave, a sight reminiscent of cave monasteries in India.

Unlike in the earthly realm, traveling in the Astral Plane relied on the mind rather than walking. Once accustomed to this realm, magi could transfer instantaneously simply by imagining their desired destination.

"Very regrettably, it's not a place we can fly directly to, because it's a secret location that cannot be reached except by transferring according to prescribed rules. As a result, we need to make various stops."

Then the scenery changed again.

A chalk palace built next to a lake. An endless desert of hot sand with only an oasis offering respite. A vast plain where a giant bird design was carved on the ground. Dense forest where all sorts of

poisonous insectivorous plants flourished. Streets evoking imagery from 1920s America in the Prohibition Era, etc...

The final destination was at the foot of a bare mountain.

Before their eyes was an ancient Greek temple. Stout marble columns stood upright in a rectangular arrangement with a roof on top. A small building.

"The appointment was clearly decided here, but the other party is absent."

No one else could be seen in the surroundings. As their guide, Alice, frowned, Yuri asked.

"Someone who does not reside here?"

"Exactly. Seriously, how could that person be tardy even at a time like this..."

"—Princess. Just as you say, I have only 'just arrived.' A minute or two's delay shouldn't count as being late, right? What do you say?"

A voice Liliana had heard before. Then came the clinking sounds of iron-studded boots striking the stone floor surrounding the temple.

Although Liliana had been in a continuous state of shock all night, this was the greatest shock of all. The same went for Yuri. In a rare moment, the prudent Yamato Nadeshiko raised her voice:

"You are the person who set up this appointment to meet us!?"

"Hoho, how honored I am to know that you are so moved to see me."

The new arrival was wearing an elegant blue suit with a black cape. Covering the face was a masked helmet with a visor whose design resembled an insect's compound eyes. Worn on the feet were iron-studded boots.

The one who had made the appointment to meet them at the Astral Plane temple was none other than John Pluto Smith.

The Campione renowned as Los Angeles' guardian saint.

"The whereabouts and exploits of Kusanagi Godou and Italy's handsome king are not precisely the reasons why I'm here."

Coming through the mask, the tenor voice sounded as lively as that of a theatrical performer.

"I heard that they've gone missing due to a certain Madame using an authority that serves as a 'passport.' As a result, a certain old acquaintance approached me to cry and beg, asking for my help no matter what."

"Requiring your personal presence as a Campione, Smith-sama.. ."

"That's very normal. The only ones capable of opposing godslayers are their peers—other godslayers—and the gods. This is universal truth."

Reacting to Liliana's murmurs, Smith shrugged.

"Then I got in touch with the princess, hoping she could relay news to me regarding this incident. In addition, I heard that there were two miko who were able to 'see' the era where Kusanagi Godou had flown to. That said, I still haven't decided if I'm going to accept my old acquaintance's request yet."

The visor's compound eyes looked towards Yuri and Liliana.

"In any case, I troubled you two to make a visit, hoping you could assist me."

"Excuse me... May I ask who this 'old acquaintance' of yours might be, Smith-sama?"

In response to Yuri's question, Smith quickly raised his right hand and pointed a gloved index finger towards the interior of the temple.

"The one who lives inside. Well, this individual is not only difficult to please but also very neurotic and pessimistic... A most troublesome personality, at any rate. Let me just add that he is also a man who is troubled to no end by the commotion raised by my friend, Madame Aisha."

"Troubled to no end...?"

Liliana frowned, unable to understand what Smith meant.

Yuri's expression suddenly went blank. Her eyes also became glass-colored while she began to murmur on her own.

"The sanctuary belonging to the one who carves time... Recording everything in the world, the library keeping the records of the void..."

"You saw it. Impressive indeed."

Hearing the oracle that Yuri spoke from spirit vision, Smith nodded. On the other hand, Liliana was worried about her companion's hypnotized state. Furthermore, this only served to raise even more questions.

"To my tentative understanding, I take it that this place is not simply a sanctuary steeped in history. If possible, please answer another of my questions. Smith-sama, how are you related to the one who lives here?"

"A truly pertinent question, Liliana Kranjcar."

Liliana was shocked that the black-clad godslayer knew her name.

She had always thought that Smith was only aware of her as nothing more than Kusanagi Godou's follower. Seeing her reaction , Smith laughed and used his left hand to push his cape open.

Revealed beneath was still the blue costume. Carried in the holster on his hip was *that gun*.

"I have a number of important connections to the Astral Plane. This is one of them."

Smith drew the handgun from his hip.

"This was something forged by the dark elves living in this realm. To me, it would be something like the magic sword Excalibur."

The six-shot large-caliber revolver. The magic gun the color of gray steel.

It was the legendary handgun quite well-known as John Pluto Smith's weapon, a tool for firing the "magic bullet authority" usurped from the goddess Artemis. It was said that the vast area of the entire California state would be incinerated utterly if the authority's full power were to be unleashed...

This magic gun was an otherworldly weapon forged in the Astral Plane—

The Witenagemot's report had mentioned it. But hearing it directly from the man himself, Liliana felt an indescribable sense of emotion, possibly due to John Pluto Smith's "masked hero charisma."

"Come to think of it, I have heard that you are able to travel freely between the earth and the Astral Plane, Smith-sama."

"Ah yes, that is one of my insignificant privileges."

Smith replied to Liliana and returned the magic gun to its holster.

"That's the power I usurped by killing one of the fairy kings who rule the Astral Plane. Furthermore, I also inherited a king's duties and obligations from him."

"Duties and obligations...?"

"Including the *Plutarch's Residence* here, this entire level is part of the territory I rule over. Oh well, despite being king, I'm actually nothing more than an absentee figurehead. But upon receiving a definite request like this one, I still can't leave things unattended after all."

Fairy king. Plutarch's Residence.

Hearing unexpected terms, Liliana was overcome with astonishment.

"I came back to this place because I received a desperate plea regarding Kusanagi Godou, Salvatore Doni and Madame Aisha... To exterminate the three of them. So, what should I do?"

Straight from John Pluto Smith's mouth came a shocking statement.

Part 3

Kusanagi Godou: godslayer, Devil King, Campione.

Despite having no desire for them, he possessed numerous abilities beyond that of ordinary humans. Nevertheless, flying in the air and breathing underwater were not among them.

Hence, even someone like him would still be plunged into a desperate crisis once thrown into the Rhine that was almost about to overflow from a sudden storm.

To escape this crisis, Godou made use of his greatest weapon.

His physical stamina. After being thrown overboard, he struggled desperately in the raging and turbid waters, swimming while trying to search for the capsized ship.

Especially shocking was Madame Aisha who was facing the same situation as him.

Despite her non-athletic appearance, she was looking for the capsized ship just like Godou. Meanwhile, the remaining companions—

"Anchor me, Cuore di Leone!"

First of all, Erica Blandelli started summoning the magic sword of the lion while falling into the river.

Manifesting in her hand, the slender longsword immediately transformed and turned into an anchor with a chain attached. Erica threw the anchor, causing it to fly at high speed towards the Rhine's shore.

She was roughly thirty meters from the shore.

Nevertheless, the anchor's flight and the chain's length both allowed it to reach the shore effortlessly.

The anchor hooked the ground with a clang, forming a lifeline connecting Erica to dry land.

Meanwhile, the other person, Seishuuin Ena—

"O Great God of Arms! I beseech you to grant me protection from drowning!"

This incantation to ward off drowning was magic that had been used previously on the goddess Circe's island.

While praying for protection, Ena desperately reached out.

The chain connecting Erica to the magic sword on the shore happened to be nearby. No, the clever blonde most likely threw the chain in consideration of the Hime-Miko's position. Ena gripped Cuore di Leone's chain with her right hand tightly.

Watching this scene, Godou was relieved. He turned to the woman beside him and said:

"Are you okay, Aisha-san!?"

"Y-Yes. I'm okay for now!"

But just at this moment, descending lightning struck Godou's ship directly.

"Uwaaaah!"

"Kyaaaaaaaah!"

Falling from the sky, the thunderclap completely destroyed the small sailing ship that Godou and the Madame had finally managed to climb aboard.

"Godou, Madame Aisha!"

"Are you okay? Respond if you're still alive!"

Erica and Ena kept screaming in desperation but Godou was too occupied to answer then.

Swallowing the turbid water again, Godou could feel the impending threat of drowning. Nevertheless, he did not give up, refusing to let his life be tarnished by such a shameful demise. Desperately, he looked for an opening.

Drifting along the Rhine under the storm, Godou and Madame Aisha were alone. The timber and bits of wood from the ship's wreckage became their allies.

Godou immediately searched for large planks of wood. Although they could not guarantee his survival, at least he would be able to float above the surface.

"Aisha-san, hurry over here!"

"Okay!"

Godou reached out to Madame Aisha who was drifting beside him. In turn, she desperately tried to grab Godou's outstretched hand—She managed to succeed. Holding hands, Godou pulled her slender and feminine body to his side.

Then the two of them drifted, holding onto a plank of wood.

But the situation was still quite terrible.

The heavy rain continued to fall nonstop while raging winds roared.

The Rhine was already a large river to begin with. The sudden increase in water volume could easily cause a flood any time.

Amidst the roaring water currents, Godou and Madame Aisha were submerged many times and relied on the wooden plank's buoyancy to float back up. It was difficult to predict how long a single wooden plank could continue to keep them safe. Moreover, rocks, trees and boats from other unknown shores had been swept into the turbulent flow, resulting in the threat of colliding with them.

The way it looked, death seemed to be looming near—

This shipwreck incident was even more hazardous than last time's impromptu whitewater rafting on the "goddess' island" in Malaysian waters. Consequently, Godou was slightly preparing himself mentally for the worst.

Roughly dozens of minutes later...

"How surprising, we're saved at last..."

"It's probably because the power of fortune protected us!"

Without a watch, Godou could not tell exactly how much time had passed.

But currently, the Rhine's surface had calmed down completely. The storm had quieted down as suddenly as it had arrived. Drifting while hugging the wooden plank, Godou and Madame Aisha were both unharmed.

However, having soaked in water for so long, the cold was an issue.

Noticing that the wooden plank had already drifted near the shore, Godou kicked his legs in the water, shifting course towards the shore. Thanks to Madame Aisha helping out with her own kicking, they soon arrived ashore.

"A blessing in disguise, is that how it goes...?"

"Yes, between the misfortune encountered due to your pursuit, Kusanagi-san, and the fortune that saved us, it's fortune's victory this time."

For some reason, Madame Aisha was smiling leisurely.

Probably accustomed to tumultuous experiences, what horrifying survival ability. Nevertheless, Godou did not have the composure to smile, for he was confronted with new worries.

"I don't think I'll make it if another incident similar to that storm appears. If only there were countermeasures..."

"Yes, in any case, let me dispel fortune's protection."

"...What, that can actually be switched on or off at will?"

Godou had thought it was an uncontrollable ability like the corridor authority.

Stared at by Godou, the Madame smiled deceptively.

"Oh, please allow me to explain. Once begun, acts of fortune or misfortune cannot be stopped, so I had to wait until the storm subsided first!"

"Well, that's actually fine, I guess..."

By this point, Godou could not bring himself to say: Shouldn't you have switched it off the moment we met again? Looking at his right arm, Godou called upon the divine sword residing there, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

"By the way, Seishuuin and Erica are safe, right!?"

'Yes... They apparently left the water before us...'

The divine sword answered irritably.

Godou nodded. Due to drifting in the river with Madame Aisha , he was worried about his companions' safety and ordered Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to relay confirmation of each other's situation between him and Ena.

True to the names of the Hime-Miko of the Sword and Erica Blandelli, they had apparently escaped the desperate crisis unharmed as well.

"Pass a message along to tell them we're fine. Then since neither side knows where they are, let's meet up at Colonia Agrippina."

'.....'

Ama no Murakumo's response felt something like a person nodding their head silently.

After arriving in ancient Gaul, Godou had found out he could use the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi as a cellphone substitute. But since the divine sword was clearly unenthusiastic about communications unrelated to battle, relying on this unmotivated communicator for a way to meet up with his companions would be quite inefficient.

Coming up with a slightly better solution, Godou finally slumped his shoulders. Much more time seemed to have passed than expected, seeing as the setting sun had dyed the western sky red. Godou decided to halt their travels for today and prepare for rest.

"Anyway, something needs to be done about these wet clothes..."

The place where Godou and Madame Aisha went ashore was a deserted grassland.

Let alone a town, a single home could not be found. Due to the violent storm, there were no boats passing by on the Rhine. Godou and Madame Aisha were thoroughly drenched. Naturally, they had no change of clothes since their luggage had sunk to the bottom of the river along with the ship, but at least they escaped with their lives.

Looking at his optimistic travel companion, Godou was stunned for an instant.

Heavy from moisture, Madame Aisha's overcoat had been taken off and discarded in the water already. Currently, she was only wearing the white robe that resembled a one-piece dress.

Due to being thoroughly wet, her clothing was clinging tightly to her skin. Thanks to that, this excessively senior woman's perfect figure was readily apparent from a single glance.

Despite a very slender physique, her voluptuous breasts were like ripened fruit whose weight would bend branches whereas her posterior displayed mesmerizing curves.

Furthermore, she was not wearing a brassiere, an article of clothing yet to be invented in ancient times. Drenched white fabric became see-through, offering faint glimpses of the skin beneath.

Then there was her long black hair, thoroughly drenched, exuding an incredible air of seductiveness...

Finding his gaze suddenly glued to her, Godou frantically averted his eyes. Then Madame Aisha noticed her current appearance and instantly covered her bosom with her arms.

"U-U-U-Umm, let us s-start a fire!"

"Th-That's a great idea!"

Erica was able to start fires with magic, but she was currently absent.

Like Godou, Madame Aisha did not seem motivated to learn magic either.

On the other hand, she was carrying flint ready for use. Together with high-valued coins, it was kept in a small and bulging bag tied to her waist.

"Carrying this sort of thing with me has proved unexpectedly handy."

The graceful female Campione remarked readily.

Godou was quite impressed by how she was so accustomed to these terrible situations that she had acquired such insight. On the other hand, Godou had also secured a bag of the Roman Empire's

gold and silver coins to himself, not unlike Aisha. Hence, all they had lost was their heavy luggage and there was no need to worry about money for their travels.

Using the flint, Madame Aisha started a fire on the dry grass and twigs that Godou had gathered. Once the small cracking fire was lit, Godou said:

"I'll head over there for now to see if anyone's coming. Just in case, I'm drying my wet clothing first."

"What is going on—Kyah!?"

Godou was taking off his shirt in front of Madame Aisha, causing her to raise her doubts. Seeing Godou's exposed upper torso, Madame Aisha stared wide-eyed.

Completely unconcerned, Godou hung his wet shirt on a branch .

"See you later."

Having said that, Godou left the fire, knowing that Madame Aisha would probably remove her wet clothing to dry by the fire if he gave her some privacy.

Godou made his move in consideration of that. After all, this would dry their clothes faster and prevent catching a cold from wearing wet clothes. Godou's pants were also completely wet, but that could not be helped.

As a side note, by the time the fire was started, the sun had already set and night had fallen.

His skin growing cold, Godou was thankful that the current season was spring. Ignoring his shivering body, Godou endured while wandering along the riverside.

Although this area was grassland, there were many flowering plants above knee-height.

This provided cover resulting in poor visibility. The area illuminated by the fire should probably be out of view.

"Huhyaaaaaah!?"

Madame Aisha's scream was heard. Did someone do something ? Godou frantically ran back to the fire. At the same time, the Madame also ran towards him.

"What happened!?"

"I-I-I-I feel something strange on my back!?"

When Godou reached her, Madame Aisha threw herself into his chest.

Back? Puzzled, Godou looked at her—And was rendered speechless. Taking another good look,

First of all, Madame Aisha was essentially nude, in a completely undressed state.

The rosy tips of her sensational and bulging breasts were exposed. Of course, her lower body was covered by nothing but a piece of thin cloth with only sandals worn on her feet.

Also, presumably intending to put it on immediately...

She had Godou's shirt on her shoulder, the one that he had hung on a branch to dry.

In this beautifully salacious manner, with her rushing and throwing herself at him, Godou not only felt the sensation of her soft but very supple bosom but also her smooth, pristine and olive skin pressing tightly against his upper body (that was nude as well).

Godou felt himself taking a massive gulp, trying to mobilize the entirety of his rational thought.

Grabbing the Madame's smooth shoulders, he pushed the olive-skinned and naked body away from him and tried to ask in as calm a voice as possible.

"Is something sticking on your back?"

"Please, h-h-h-hurry and get it off me!"

Aisha pleaded tearfully, so Godou peered at her back in head-tilted puzzlement. Due to Godou's shirt hanging on her shoulder, he could not see what was under the white fabric.

"A-A-A-A weird squirming sensation, s-s-s-so terrifying, please hurry and get rid of it!"

"E-Easy for you to say..."

Face red, Godou wanted to refuse but Madame Aisha looked up tearfully at him in a pleading manner, making it truly impossible to refuse.

Godou had no choice but to brush aside the shirt on the Madame's shoulder and discovered a gecko on her shoulder blade.

Picking it up casually and throwing it away, the ridiculous affair finally concluded.

"Umm... It's fine now."

"Th-Thank you very much."

Thinking about it after the fact, this gecko incident really was a tempest in a teapot.

Before Godou's eyes was Madame Aisha's naked body, wearing nothing except sandals, meaning he was staring straight ahead at her.

Furthermore, there was not a single cloud in the night sky with a clear moon shining brightly above.

Bathed beneath the moonlight, the Madame's body was in no way inferior to a goddess'.

A sight of fantasy. In addition, the perfectly unblemished olive skin was gradually turning red, as though finally feeling a sense of embarrassment...

"Kyaaaaaaaah!"

She screamed at last. Then the Madame began to yell in awkward embarrassment.

"Honestly, Kusanagi-san, you're discarding your usual serious-minded front to ogle me with this male gaze...! I-I knew it, you're so captivated by me that you can't help yourself, right!?"

"Please stop talking incomprehensibly. Hurry up and put on some clothes!"

Part 4

After taking turns to watch over the fire throughout the night, Godou and Madame Aisha were greeted by the arrival of morning.

Without extra clothing to use as blankets, they lasted through the night relying on nothing but the fire. Not catching a cold was probably thanks to luck or the resilience of Campiones.

As soon as the sky grew light, the two of them went along the Rhine and returned to the road.

After walking several hours downstream, they reached a small village. There, they bought things like food and travel equipment. Inquiring from the villagers, they learned that Colonia Agrippina was two and half days' journey away.

"The city where we caught up to you, Aisha-san... That was Mogontiacum, wasn't it? I remember that it takes a week to get to Colonia Aggripina from there, right?"

"Well, because we drifted here, it ended up being a shortcut!"

Indeed, a blessing in disguise.

The protection of fortune conferred by Madame Aisha's authority was definitely quite useful in terms of possible benefits. However, getting swept up in the disasters caused by misfortune was a bit much...

After the Madame bought a new overcoat at the village, the two of them resumed their journey.

Whether in ancient or modern times, horses for riding were expensive livestock. Furthermore, this village did not have horses for sale. In the end, the two Campiones decided to move on foot.

Godou prided in his athleticism and did not find walking hard at all.

Despite her delicate and graceful appearance, Madame Aisha turned out to be surprisingly adept at walking long distances. Although the two of them got along well enough as they advanced along their journey, there were minor disputes on occasion.

At sunset, Madame Aisha spoke up uncomfortably:

"E-Excuse me, boys and girls should not share beds after the age of seven. Let's sleep in separate rooms when we find shelter for tonight!"

"You're very right. I understand."

Naturally, Godou agreed readily to this perfectly reasonable request.

For some reason, Madame Aisha was shocked by his response, staring into Godou's face.

"K-Kusanagi-san is fine with that!?"

"Of course. No problem."

"U-Umm. Like when traveling together as a pair, finding an opportunity to make a suitable excuse to sleep in the same room... Are you sure you're not harboring those kinds of indecent intentions, Kusanagi-san!?"

"Of course not. Please rest without worry."

Godou replied indifferently in response to Madame Aisha's strange worries. Did having her naked body seen last night put these redundant fears into her mind?

"Umm, I think that last night's incident was the result of carelessness on our part. Proportionately speaking, I think you're 60% responsible, Aisha-san..."

"Ooh... Well, even though I can't deny that I was screaming quite loudly..."

However, they only realized after walking further. This area did not seem to have any homes for them to seek shelter. Hence, the pair camped outdoors again.

Still, things went a lot smoother than the previous night.

Not only did they have newly bought travel equipment to replace what they had lost, but also delicious and portable food. Of course, the risk of bandits still existed but given Madame Aisha's authorities, human traps could be easily escaped, by and large. Hence, that night...

In a clearing far away from the road, the two of them started to camp. Facing Godou who was sitting beside the fire, Madame Aisha murmured uneasily:

"U-Umm, Kusanagi-san, since there's no wall to separate us, you're not going to do anything indecent, are you?"

"Of course not."

"Because I'm a girl after all. If you were to embrace me passionately, Kusanagi-san, whispering sweet nothings into my ear in your habitual manner, intending to steal my lips, although I might end up a little excited, that's completely unacceptable, got that!?"

"I never had a habit of doing any of that in the first place."

"Really, despite spending your honeymoon-like days with Erica-san and Ena-san?"

"That's not what our relationships are like!"

Finding the odds quite stacked against him in this conversation, Godou changed the subject.

"Besides, aren't you over a hundred and fifty years older than me, Aisha-san? Normally, whispering sweet nothings to someone like that isn't possible, right?"

"Y-You're supposed to say 'love knows no boundaries in age' in a situation like this, Kusanagi-san!"

"No... I think there'll be a generation gap."

"Seriously! Making me out to be an old hag or something... Allow me to make myself clear. Let alone a century and a half, I haven't even reached half that age yet!"

Madame Aisha indignantly raised unexpected objections.

"When returning to the present age, there were many occasions when I skipped over decades."

"...Skipped over?"

"One time, after spending three months in the past, I returned to the present using the corridor to find that roughly thirty years had elapsed already."

"!?"

"Conversely, there was one time when not even two days went by in the present despite spending two years in the past."

Urashima Tarou, Rip Van Winkle, that Chinese parable of a transient dream...[1]

Madame Aisha's journeys through time were as unbelievable as the places visited in those stories. Then Godou was shocked. What if a century had passed when he returned to the modern world, then he would be having a surreal experience like Urashima Tarou's...

Concluded lifespans of everyone he knew, all passed away...

Nevertheless, Madame Aisha simply said to Godou:

"Well, so long as a large amount of magic power is injected into the corridor during the return, it's possible to control the passage of time to 'several decades' or 'a few days' later, to a certain extent."

Hearing that, Godou breathed a sigh of relief.

"...If it's possible to adjust, why did you return to thirty years later?"

"B-Because if I didn't do that, I'd end up with the actual age of an old lady despite being thirty years old in official records!"

"Deliberately becoming Urashima Tarou by your own free will... "

That would be like a time traveler setting off in the year 1999 then intentionally "returning" ten years later in 2009 to prevent other people from calling him prematurely aged. What kind of epic science fiction story was this...?

Furthermore, Madame Aisha was a Campione.

Given that superhuman constitution, her body was most likely very youthful indeed. Apparently, the bodies of female magi aged much slower than that of male magi.

Even more so for Campiones. His sworn elder sister, Luo Cuilian, was a prime example.

"If that's the case, I'm curious about something."

"What is it?"

"If you had to say it, Aisha-san, how old are you? Not your age according to official records, but the actual time you've lived."

This was a slightly impolite question, so Godou tried asking without much expectation.

"Umm, I've never tried calculating it properly..."

"An estimate is fine. Are you roughly forty or fifty?"

"....."

"Oh, of course, I won't force you to answer."

"...Seventeen."

"Eh?"

"My physical and mental age is seventeen years old."

"Hold on a sec, that's an impossible number no matter what."

"Knowing nothing of my life, Kusanagi-san, you are in no position to reject it. If I say I'm seventeen years old, then that's final !"

"Then that would make you my contemporary..."

"A-Any objections to that!?"

In any case, there was no other pastime during their journey apart from chatting. Before they knew it, the two of them were deeply engaged in conversation. But then they suddenly stopped

talking at the same time. A distinctive and unusual stench was drifting over, carried by the night breeze. Compared to the foul odors of animals in zoos, this was even more intense.

"Is there a ranch nearby? Raising pigs or cattle."

"Maybe, I guess..."

Madame Aisha's response was very simple.

But in fact, even Godou did not believe his own speculation. Although there was no evidence, if anything, all he had was a feeling that this unusual stench was a ominous sign of something inauspicious to come. For some reason, that was what he thought.

Godou stood up silently and went upwind.

Madame Aisha followed quietly as well.

They had been sitting in a grassy plain. Climbing a small hill in front of them, Godou and Madame Aisha were rendered speechless. On the other side of the hill, sixty bears were moving.

All the bears were moving in one direction.

Like sheep following a shepherd, the bears were coming to Godou and Aisha's campsite as though riding upon the wind.

There was also something else surprising. Without exception, every bear was massive, roughly two meters in body length.

Occasionally, there were even larger bears, four to five meters long and as big as small hills.

"Aisha-san, umm, these aren't normal bears in this era, right?"

"I doubt it, no matter how you look at it..."

All the bears seem quite excited and displayed vicious eyes. Nevertheless, not a single bear got into a fight with any of its surrounding kin.

They were like gangsters heading off to a group fight.

A human contingent appeared in front of the bears' advance, roughly numbering eighty. All members were armed with swords, spears, axes and shields or the like, all fired up and ready to kill.

"Oh dear, who could these people be?"

"The way I see it, they look like gangsters before starting a fight. "

After muttering that, Godou realized that his impression was correct.

The armed men suddenly drew their weapons and started charging at the bear army with a great battle cry.

"Ehhh!?"

Too reckless. Godou was shocked.

The human side consisted of Caucasians with big and tall physiques. Their equipment rattled. They all had light-colored hair and almost everyone had strange hairstyles. On the top of their heads, their hair was tied into "topknots."

"They're probably the Franks."

"Really!?"

"Yes, that hairstyle should be part of Frankish customs."

Madame Aisha pointed to the armed group that was beginning a battle on the hill.

First of all, they threw hand axes at nearby bears. Then when the beasts dodged, they used weapons like spears and swords to attack. Many of the Frankish warriors first threw axes then switched to close quarters combat. Their customs were probably just as strange as their hairstyles.

Overall, rather than reckless, the Frankish warriors were better described as courageous.

Confronted with an army of bears that surpassed them in strength and size, they still fought valiantly.

Some of the bears stood on their hind legs and used their front limbs to pummel the Frankish warriors. Using sharp claws to tear enemies apart, other bears swatted nearby Franks away and easily bit them.

Suffering from the savage beasts' attacks, the battlefield was soon filled with blood and screams.

However, there were quite a few Franks who managed to dodge attacks and use their shields to defend fellow warriors who were going on offense. Using battle axes and swords to cut through the bear army, the survivors started to counterattack. Also , there were others who pierced bears with spears and shot arrows from a distance.

When the battle first started, Godou had expected the Franks to lose miserably.

But unexpectedly, the tide had shifted to a battle on equal footing. Although the Franks did not have martial arts experts like Erica or Ena, these ancient warriors wielded ancient weapons superbly to engage the vicious beasts in battle.

"Speaking of which, Roman amphitheaters did have gladiators defeating ferocious beasts..."

Godou recalled what he had heard from Erica.

Martial artists fighting bears unarmed would probably be suicidal, but given spears, shields, throwing nets and other equipment, humans had pretty good odds even against lions as opponents. Ancient gladiators stood as evidence for that.

But in this case, the bear army included massive giants beyond normal parameters.

These were the four to five-meter-long bears that were as big as small hills, numbering a total of six. As expected, the Franks were unable to hold their ground against these beasts. As the battle grew desperate, more and more casualties resulted. Godou frowned. Whether saving human lives or protecting animals, he could not actively commit to either.

"Kusanagi-san, I will go stop this battle!"

"Then I'll come as well—"

Just as he nodded in response to Aisha, Godou saw it.

Among the Franks, there were several men who were guarding horse-drawn carts in the back instead of taking part in battle. One of the men was walking leisurely towards the most intense spot in the battle.

Along the way, he was attacked by a number of giant bears.

Every time, he sliced off the giant bears' attacking claws and teeth then continued advancing. Like the gentle descent of flower petals, his agile body made simple movements to evade the ferocious beasts. Just by looking, these were clearly motions that were not possible without advanced mastery of martial arts.

There was an especially enormous bear at the place he was heading towards.

The vigorously fighting Franks retreated as soon as they noticed his arrival.

They probably intended to stay out of the [King]'s battle.

Casually drawing the longsword at his waist, the man approached one of the bigger bears.

It was a giant bear with a body length of four to five meters. If it stood on its hind legs, the bear would be one story high. Taking leisurely footsteps, the man walked up to this ferocious beast.

Indeed, he was walking as naturally as if he were visiting a friend's house.

Then came a flash of the sword.

Even Godou's dynamic vision combined with a godslayer's focus could not capture the swing of his sword clearly. On the other hand, that one swing of the sword ended up chopping the bear's giant body into two.

Sliced from head to rump in a vertical line, the bear was definitely split in half by a single strike.

As a side note, the massive bear did not shed a single drop of blood. Presumably not a creature of this world, it was a being more akin to a divine beast. Next, the young man used the same technique to make five swings of his sword.

The remaining giant bears were all split into halves, instantly annihilated.

"—!?"

By Godou's side, Madame Aisha gasped.

She must have felt shocked by the scene and realized the man's true identity.

"That guy Doni's over there. Let me go over to have a look first."

Saying that, Godou went down the hill. Although he knew that Madame Aisha was following behind him, he did not take his gaze off the man at all.

The one displaying such swordsmanship and the essence of the magic sword was a blond young man.

Salvatore Doni, of course. He had arrived in this ancient era a couple months ago. His attire also belonged to this era. Wearing clothing similar to a t-shirt, his simple attire included a belt and narrow pants on the bottom with a brown overcoat on top.

Only his boots were still the leather shoes he liked wearing in the present.

As one would expect, this manner of dress facilitated movement best. A longsword hung at his waist.

Swords in ancient Gaul were mostly one-handed with short hilts. However, Doni's sword had a long hilt and looked like it could be wielded either with one hand or two. This was probably an item he had brought along from the present.

Noticing Godou approaching, Doni smiled cheerfully.

"Ah, it's you, Godou. I feel like it's been a while."

"Of course, you've been here three months already, right?"

Sighing, Godou answered.

Moreover, although the giant bears were all eliminated, dozens of normal bears still remained.

However, these bears suddenly stopped fighting the Franks and quieted down. They looked like they had lost interest and hostility towards humans, as though exorcised of demonic possession.

Walking away independently, the bears casually dispersed.

It was as though they were moving back to the forest, having finished their task. Seeing the enemies retreat, the surviving Frankish warriors cheered victoriously.

OHHHHHHHHHHH! OHHHHHHHHHHH! OHHHHHHHHHH!

Under the night sky, the plain resounded with the warrior's manly voices.

"I've heard quite a lot about you. Becoming the chieftain of the Franks and challenging that Uldin of the Huns to a future fight and all that."

"Oh, so you've also met this era's godslayer."

"Not only that, I've even met someone from our era..."

Madame Aisha was not near Doni and Godou. Instead, she was shuttling around between the wounded Franks who were lying on the ground. In order to heal them, she was rushing about all over the place.

Apart from imminent death, all injuries could be healed rapidly no matter how severe. This was the effect of the Madame's authority.

Watching this scene, Doni went "I see" and smiled. He was quite sharp in these matters.

"As expected of my dear friend, my Godou. When did you find Madame Aisha? She really is quite strong, right?"

"Totally not strong in the sense you're talking about. Also, stop adding those descriptions on top of my name."

Things would go out of hand if Doni's appetite for battle were to be fired up. Hence, Godou refuted him firmly.

Nevertheless, Godou did not consider the Madame "weak." Madame Aisha's scariness was probably on a completely different dimension compared to fighting with swords.

Did Doni realize what Godou was thinking? In a rare display, he was staring at this woman with eyes filled with curiosity.

But he suddenly laughed and turned towards Godou.

"Right, Godou, although there's much I want to talk about, could you first accompany me to do some trivial chores?"

Then Doni shifted his gaze towards the hill, the place where Godou was just now.

Godou looked in that direction and was met with surprise. Without him noticing, new opponents had gathered on the hill. Like the ones Doni massacred earlier, there was an army of giant bears as big as houses.

This time, there were thirty or so of them.

These animals were arranged in a row on the hill, moving this way—More accurately, they were viciously gazing down at Salvatore Doni.

However, standing behind the massive bears was an even bigger monster.

Roughly thirty meters in full length, resembling an owl—But with thick front limbs instead of wings. It looked like some kind of owl-bear hybrid.

Seeing this kind of owl-bear that one definitely would not find in an animal encyclopedia, Godou muttered:

"Feels like a lord of the forest from some kind of anime..."

The owl-bear stood up on its hind legs, its appearance as solemn as a god.

Very clearly a divine beast. Godou's back shook as he felt his body filling up with power to fight. Seeing this, Doni smiled beside him.

Meanwhile, the surrounding Franks were sent into a panic by the sight of the giant divine beast.

The warriors screamed in terror, their bodies trembling as they fled with weapons drawn, resulting in great chaos. Even though they had fought valiantly on the battlefield, they were unable to suppress their fear for the unknown monster.

Madame Aisha also looked at the divine beast with a shocked expression.

"You handle the big monster, Godou. I'll take care of the small ones!"

"Don't just dump troublesome tasks on others!"

Grumbling, Godou looked seriously at the giant owl-bear.

He was not obliged to humor Doni. However, hesitating here on whether to fight or not would put Madame Aisha and the Franks at risk. Furthermore, that presence he felt just now—

"A long-armed strike!"

Doni swung his longsword widely in a horizontal arc with extreme speed.

Then the [All-Severing Magic Sword] released silver radiance from the blade's edge.

This light traced out a magnificent horizontal line in the darkness of the night. Lined up in a row, the giant bear army on the hill was dealt with in a single strike. Thirty enemies were completely bifurcated at the waist.

The hill was about fifty meters from his location. What a terrifying act of divinity.

On the other hand, Godou did not dally next to Doni.

"The one unblunted and unapproachable, oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

Chanting spell words, he summoned the [Boar].

Naturally, the target was the thirty-meter long owl-bear.

With pitch-black fur and a body length of twenty meters or so, the giant boar lost greatly in size. Nevertheless, it would not be Godou's avatar if it were intimidated that easily.

ROOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

Howling as usual, the [Boar] charged at full speed. Struck by the hooves, the ground rumbled as the beast instantly rushed up the green hill. Using the tusks by its mouth as spears, it charged to create a collision!

In contrast, the owl-bear stood upright without moving, as though trying to show off the immovability of its massive body.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

The owl-bear howled as well, blocking the [Boar]'s charge head on like a giant net. The two enormous divine beasts clashed face to face.

The result was the victory of the [Boar]'s power and momentum .

The giant boar buried its tusks deeply into the owl-bear's chest, boldly pushing down its prey.

Enduring the mass of the two divine beasts, the ground rumbled heavily and shook violently.

With that, the owl-bear was exterminated. The [Boar] roared victoriously.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

In spite of that, Godou still frowned. He had anticipated a much tougher fight. The enemy's master should still be nearby and Godou had expected more divine power to be delivered into the divine beast.

"Due to injuries, the enemy has become cautious."

Doni threw a glance at him, causing Godou to anger slightly.

It felt inexplicably maddening to hear Doni speaking at this moment as though he had read Kusanagi Godou's mind. Putting that issue aside, Godou looked towards the hill again.

Still intoxicated in the afterglow of victory, the [Boar] roared towards the moon.

But in the next instant, green smoke was released from the ground. Breathing in the gas, the [Boar] suddenly began to cough violently.

The green smoke surrounded the giant black body. The [Boar] coughed even more intensely.

"Kusanagi-san, that is poison mist! This will be very dangerous if it continues!"

Madame Aisha spoke from beside him.

As expected of someone able to use an authority of healing, she instantly discerned what it was. Furthermore, the enemy was quite sly, targeting the [Boar]'s opening when it was careless from the joy of victory.

"That's enough, hurry up and disappear!"

Godou ordered the [Boar] that was about to suffocate from coughing.

The pitch-black divine beast instantly vanished. It probably followed orders so obediently because it had already vanquished

its target. The Frankish army also began to retreat from the battlefield.

With giant monsters appearing one after another, their fear had already reached a limit.

On the other hand, the three remaining godslayers...

"Time for you to show yourself, right?"

Godou casually called out to the hidden opponent.

Then a beauty suddenly made her appearance. Strongly built, gazing sharply, she exuded a queen's haughtiness and solemnity. She was wearing simple clothes akin to undergarments with a pelt on top.

A deep, reddish-brown pelt, it looked like it was skinned off a bear together with its head. Furthermore, she was wearing the ferocious beast's deceased visage on her head like a crown.

Godou knew for certain. The goddess before his eyes was called the "Queen of Beasts."

Every Campione's mind and body would enter a state of battle readiness when encountering a deity.

Due to feeling the surge of power in anticipation of battle for a while now, Godou already knew she would appear.

"Truth be told, I am still hesitating even now..."

The Beast Goddess murmured softly.

"Vexing as it may be, quite a number of godslayers continue to exist in this world. One of them even went as far as to inflict this heavy injury upon me... With this wounded body of mine, exacting vengeance shall be no easy task..."

Apart from the pelt, her attire was basically underwear, so it was clear to see immediately.

The goddess' pale abdomen was marred by a long laceration. Red-black and ulcerated, the wound looked very painful. It must be quite a severe injury.

"Nevertheless, this is not enough to permit an earth goddess to forge *that certain blade*. Not on anyone's cause but my own pride that forbids so. Hence my hesitation. Moreover, the preparations are yet to be ready..."

At this moment, the goddess turned her piercing gaze towards Godou and the rest.

After looking at Salvatore Doni, Kusanagi Godou and Madame Aisha in sequence, she shook her head as though troubled by a dilemma. In the end, she murmured in resignation:

"On the other hand, the fact that things have come to this cannot be helped. Since the godslayers have increased by two, it is necessary that I resolve myself to endure the foul waters that shall pollute my wound... Beware, godslayers. Abominable Rakshasa Monarchs."

The Beast Goddess spoke quietly. Suddenly, she revealed a gentle smile.

"In our next encounter, I shall bring *my son* before you. He is the existence sent by the heavens to vanquish all of you."

Despite clearly pronouncing a death sentence for Godou and the other Campiones, the goddess's tone of voice was remarkably calm.

It was as though she was mourning the certain deaths of these formidable adversaries.

"Sooner or later, Goddess Artio's son shall manifest before you all. Tremble all you want when the time comes..."

Leaving behind these whispers like a song, the goddess suddenly vanished from sight.

In this manner, Kusanagi Godou encountered a [Heretic Goddess] in ancient Gaul.

She was called the goddess Artio. This encounter would raise the curtain for a new battle—One that was not supposed to take place.

Chapter 3 - Goddess from the Land of Gaul

Part 1

Salvatore Doni had drifted to the land of ancient Gaul, three months earlier.

After encountering the godslayer of this era, Uldin, he wandered north aimlessly. At the time, he simply took the sword he had brought from the modern era and casually stood it upright on the ground. The blade happened to point north when it fell.

Apart from the sword, all he had was the clothing on his body. Completely penniless, he embarked on his journey in the past.

The language was also different from the modern world. Without a single acquaintance. An ordinary twenty-first century person would probably have given up in less than three days. Nevertheless, Doni actually enjoyed himself.

During the few days he stayed at Uldin's castle, he already learned the local language.

Despite lacking money, using his natural cheerfulness and shamelessness, he was able to join a caravan he encountered by chance to serve as a bodyguard, thereby starting to travel for free openly.

Also, he confiscated all the money from the robbers he captured alive when they attacked the caravan. Furthermore, he forced them to lead him to their stash of valuables and very astutely claimed them for his own...

Casually going about in his travels, Doni soon arrived in the area where the Franks resided.

The Franks originally roamed the area along the Rhine and were a tribe of barbarians who repeatedly looted from the Roman Empire's inhabitants.

But ever since they were suppressed by Emperor Julian the Apostate, they became subservient to the Empire as allies and moved to live in what would become southern Holland and northern Belgium in modern times.

Furthermore, in the village that Doni happened to visit by chance...

Reportedly, it was as quiet as a funeral wake. The Frankish villagers cursed the cruelty of fate, weeping, sighing mournfully.

According to the villagers, this village was going to be destroyed soon, due to a divine curse.

"Curse?"

"Yeah. Due to angering that goddess from just now, Artio, she prophesied that 'These people will all die in a matter of a few dozen days.' Then I arrived."

Doni explained to the puzzled Godou.

After fighting the bears, Godou and Madame Aisha went along with the Franks and stayed overnight.

Then the next morning, the whole group took off for Colonia Agrippina.

With the three Campiones sitting with the cargo on the horse-drawn carts, they slowly advanced on the roads. In order to allow Doni's followers to keep up, some of whom were walking on foot, they did not travel at too fast a rate.

"So that was why you fought the goddess..."

"It really was an awesome battle. We both injured each other severely, finally ending in a draw. Oh well, I just happened to recover much faster than her."

Doni's magic sword was able to slice through everything. But that was not all.

It was also able to cause explosions when cutting through the enemy's body, produce wounds that had difficulty healing, along with a number of myriad applications. Godou had tasted it personally himself. That was probably why Artio's wound was recovering so slowly.

On the other hand, the third person present was listening to their conversation with a touched look on her face.

"So, Doni-san was fighting all-out to protect the Franks... What a noble sense of self-sacrifice!"

Naturally, the speaker was none other but Madame Aisha.

Perhaps due to her honest and benevolent personality, she interpreted Doni's actions as motivated by good intentions.

This was completely different from Godou's thoughts, which were along the lines of "This guy definitely took action as he pleased without thinking deeply at all. He's fighting simply because he met a deity."

"I-I am truly sorry. To think I even mistook Salvatore Doni for an atrocious demon whose tyrannical willfulness caused trouble without any concern for the people around him."

"Really? Well, the misunderstanding can be cleared up right now."

Answering in this manner, Doni laughed foolishly in a matter-of-fact manner.

"Oh dear, to be honest, my friend Andrea keeps saying that I'm human scum, without any value in living, as lacking in thought as an invertebrate, born as a beast that creates trouble for others, etc, so I was beginning to think I might really be like that."

"Goodness gracious, to think he would be unable to understand your noble heart, Doni-san! That person must surely be the greatest idiot of all."

"....."

Seeing the two Campiones getting along so well, Godou sighed towards the heavens.

The Madame looked like she had completely forgotten Doni's " atrocious act" of conquering Colonia Agrippina.

Oh well, this might be much easier to deal with compared to having a conflict.

Deciding to put this matter aside for now, Godou changed the subject.

"So, how did you become the boss of the Franks?"

"Well, this happened back when I was recuperating in the Frankish village after the battle with the goddess. They asked me, hoping I could become the chieftain to rule the Franks in this area."

"Why did it become like this!?"

Seeing Godou's outburst, Doni explained without a care.

"Since having me around, even a goddess can be defeated. That's why. Also, the Franks from other lands heard about me and came one after another to make friends with me, or to test my power... After handling them as appropriate, I was already the great chieftain by the time I realized."

"What the heck, great chieftain..."

"Something like a big boss who unified a number of Frankish tribes and now rules over them? Oh well, I think it's kind of nice to fight alongside everyone."

"Don't go becoming king so thoughtlessly..."

The Franks were most likely a tribe of fierce and courageous warriors. Godou could tell clearly from the way they fought the bears. Furthermore, awestruck by Doni's power in singlehandedly fighting a deity on equal footing, they worshiped this man as a living god...

In actual fact, for Godou who was able to summon the [Boar], they also received him with the highest level of respect.

Madame Aisha was already worshiped by them for her " miraculous hands of healing." After all, she had displayed her ability to heal the injured Frankish warriors and even revive bears as well.

"Thereafter, the goddess frequently ordered bear armies under her command to attack the Frankish settlements. In order to protect these people who are under attack, a city is needed, right? Since there happened to be a walled Roman city nearby over by the Rhine, I decided to head over and ask them to borrow it for now."

"Is that the city called Colonia Agrippina?"

"Yes yes, that's the one. Since our discussion broke down, it became a battle between me and the Roman army. It ended up something like me driving them out of the city by force."

"Using 'ended up' is totally wrong!"

"So, hearing that I took the city, the Frankish tribes gathered here from all over the place. Right now, they're preparing for round two against Artio. Since I was too bored, I took some troops and went out to scout, resulting in yesterday's battle."

After learning of the situation, Godou sighed.

"Don't go changing history so easily, okay?"

"Oh well, I just went with the flow!"

"No matter how radiant a smile you make while speaking, idiotic words are still idiotic words... By the way, I've got a question. Why did that goddess called Artio curse the Franks?"

After admonishing Doni who was making a thumbs-up, Godou changed the subject.

Perhaps because he felt compelled by a sense of duty to say something constructive.

"Perhaps she bears some kind of grudge against them?"

"Now that you mention it, what could it be?"

"That's the most important point, you idiot!"

"Uh, lemme think, during the earlier duel, Artio did say something. I remember it was something about her being summoned by the resentment of the people of Gaul who died from Frankish attacks."

"The people of Gaul—Their resentment?"

But the Franks were also inhabitants of Gaul, right?

Godou did not understand what it meant. On the other hand, Doni was uninterested in the meaning of those words. However, the third Campione reacted differently from both of them. Madame Aisha murmured slightly sadly.

"The goddess named Artio... She's probably a Celtic deity."

"What does that mean?"

"Summarizing the essentials, although ancient Gaul was part of the Roman Empire's territory, its inhabitants, the Gauls, were mostly tribes of Celtic descent."

That was who the Celts were, inhabitants of ancient Europe.

Godou knew these facts roughly. They were an ethnic group that had no written language, worshiped nature and were adept at using iron tools. However, they were supposed to have gradually fallen into decline as history transitioned from the ancient to the medieval period.

"I think I remember the Celts losing in their battle to resist the Germanic peoples and were driven out of their lands. Then they crossed the Strait of Dover and migrated over to Britain, right?"

"Yes, that's what is believed. Also, the Germanic peoples include the Goths, the Lombards, the Burgundians, the Franks who later founded France, and others."

"Ah..."

"The Franks invaded various places in Gaul over a long period of time, looting and killing repeatedly."

"So the victimized peoples' curse summoned that goddess huh... "

"This could be the result of a magical ritual to summon a [Heretic God], performed by magi or priests inheriting Celtic bloodlines..."

A rise and fall story of earthly impermanence. Viewed from a modern perspective, the Franks' current predicament, attacked by the goddess, could only be described as their comeuppance.

That said, intervention from the authorities of Heretic Gods did factor into the human world's rise and fall.

As one may expect, this was not entirely out of place.

In the end, Godou was nothing more than a modern visitor in passing. Whether the Franks or the Roman Empire, he had no intention of aiding either of them. However, Godou believed that

as a human, first and foremost, he was at least obliged to repel the pursuing goddess...

"Well, even if I'm doing it, I'm definitely not going to use Doni's approach..."

"Hey hey, don't say it like I've been doing something stupid."

"'Like' doesn't even cut it. You are currently doing stupid things , in the present continuous sense. I'll figure out a way to deal with that goddess, so you should take a break for now."

"No no, I've got an idea about this matter, actually."

Godou proposed his correct opinion, but Doni objected frivolously.

"Kusanagi Godou and Salvatore Doni, let's see which of the two Campiones will defeat the goddess first—We should have a contest between the two of us!"

"This guy still likes to talk nonsense as always..."

Godou muttered while trying to think.

Letting Doni do whatever he pleased was definitely out of the question. But trying to imprison him somewhere also posed a challenge. Why not go along with him to act as someone to monitor him and stop his stupid behavior from continuing?

Was this where he should compromise? Sighing from the bottom of his heart, Godou spoke:

"It can't be helped. If I agree to your idea, you must stay within my sight at all times, okay?"

"Oh, so you're saying that stealing a march is forbidden. Then before the battle against Artio, we might as well have a duel between you and me first, to decide who gets to challenge the goddess, how's that?"

"Shut up. As if anyone's going to do something so tiring!"

Worn out from dealing with Doni, Godou noticed something by chance.

Madame Aisha was staring at him intently. Her gaze also seemed to be expressing disapproval.

"What's the matter, Aisha-san?"

"Oh nothing. Kusanagi-san, didn't you just say something like ' you must stay within my sight at all times'? It sounded almost like a speech of courtship..."

"Please don't misinterpret. Because I'd like to request the same from you, Aisha-san."

"Eh?"

"Absolutely do not leave my sight—Please stay by my side."

Since it would be bad if she only paid lip service, Godou tried to plead in as sincere a tone of voice as possible. As a result, Madame Aisha began to act awkward for some reason, nodding vigorously.

"R-Really, it can't be helped. Since you've already said this much, Kusanagi-san, I will try my best to do that..."

After that, they kept going on their journey while protecting the Franks.

By afternoon the next day, walking on a road along the Rhine's shore, Godou and the group could already see a large city ahead of them.

This was also a Roman colonial city built beside the great river. On the city's east was the Rhine. The remaining three sides on the north, west and south were surrounded by city walls. Defense on all sides was rock-solid.

This was Colonia Agrippina.

...The city that Doni had taken possession roughly a week earlier.

Part 2

Many modern European metropolises were originally ancient Roman colonial cities.

Apart from the few cities Godou had visited, this also included Bonna (Bonn), Lutetia (Paris), Portus Namnetum (Nantes), Lugdunum (Lyon), Genava (Geneva), Massalia (Marseille), Aquincum (Budapest).

All of them were cities that even a Japanese person would recognize and go "come to think of it..." upon hearing their modern names.

This was only logical, given the presence of aqueducts, road networks, public baths, and other infrastructure for living, as well as amphitheaters, arenas and other entertainment facilities. Also, there was protection conferred by standing Roman armies...

Presumably, every colonial city offered all these things without exception.

Naturally, people would flock to the cities for their comfort and stimulating entertainment. The cities' subsequent development would then be inherited by the future world.

Later known as Cologne, the city of Colonia Agrippina was also perfectly equipped with all sorts of urban infrastructure. Life here for Godou was just as comfortable as in Augusta Raurica earlier. Furthermore, unlike that city, this one was defended on all sides by city walls.

At one point, Roman soldiers assuming the title of emperor had apparently used this city as the capital of their short-lived Gallic Empire.

"To think he conquered this place singlehandedly, what kind of heroic saga is that..."

Godou recalled what Doni had cheerfully talked about.

It was now two days after they had arrived in Colonia Agrippina. Godou's current location was in the courtyard of a vast mansion that the Franks had prepared for "the great chieftain's ally ."

Salvatore Doni's only skilled weapon was the sword.

However, the sword was just a weapon wielded in "one-on-one" battles to begin with.

In the ancient Roman army, soldiers used spears and shields as their basic equipment, arranging themselves into formations to move en masse on the battlefield. Cavalry armed with bows and arrows were necessary to oppose them. Hence, these kinds of armaments and tactics on the battlefield were the most effective.

Conquering the battlefield with a single sword was not something a human was capable of.

Nevertheless, Salvatore Doni achieved it effortlessly.

More than likely, using the mystic sword skill he displayed in the battle where he annihilated the bears in one strike, he had blown away dozens if not hundreds of soldiers all at once, thus by his own very words, obtaining victory before he knew it. Absolutely ridiculous.

"Excuse me, master."

"...I already told you yesterday, could you not call me that?"

Godou instantly replied as soon as he was addressed.

Imperceptibly, a maid had arrived by his side. She was a roughly sixteen-year-old Frank with quite a cute face.

Offered to him together with the house when he was taken to " Kusanagi Godou's residence" yesterday, a servant—One of many servants.

"It makes me feel uncomfortable. Besides, I don't really need servants."

"What are you talking about? Master, you are exalted as the great chieftain's ally in addition to rivaling 'Tyr's Sword' Uldin in power. No one would object even if you had thirty servants or so. Rather, even double that would be fine."

"....."

Including this girl, Godou's residence had a total of thirty servants.

This was actually quite a pain and it was all arranged by the Franks.

Originally a Roman army officer's mansion, this residence was frighteningly vast. Even with thirty servants living together here, there was still plenty of space.

"Well, let's put that aside for now."

Godou could feel a shred of agony in his voice.

"Among those thirty people, what the heck is with all of them being young maidens!? With me as the only man in a house filled with women, I can't help but feel embarrassed! At least replace them with men!"

"Hoho, what are you saying now?"

No matter how Godou requested from the bottom of his heart, the maid remained smiling.

She had mentioned earlier that she was a daughter of Frankish nobles and already "used to" getting along with prestigious people. Perhaps because she was used to it, Godou could frequently see her acting "with too much familiarity."

Godou was almost about to scream "I get it" when she spoke up:

"I have heard how you lived in your previous city, master, surrounded by your two beloved consorts, building something like a nest of love. Furthermore, you got along well with His Highness Uldin who is known for his lust. The two of you even established an alliance of comrades as a result of your 'compatible taste in women'..."

"This rubbish must be coming from Madame Aisha, right!? Almost everything is false!"

It would not be surprising for rumors purely about Kusanagi Godou at Augusta Raurica to have spread all the way to Colonia Agrippina.

But information regarding Uldin's ties to the "great chieftain's ally" should be very sparse indeed.

Despite that fact, this maid actually knew of that event.

Apart from Madame Aisha who had come from Raurica together with him, Godou could not think of anyone else leaking such news.

On the other hand, faced with Godou's indignation, the maid gave a knowing look.

"Apart from preparing a residence worthy of your stature, we have also put in consideration in the choice of personnel to serve you. This is our tribe's hospitality, so please enjoy yourself without reservation."

"That's exactly why I feel embarrassed! It really makes me very uncomfortable!"

Godou was currently in the courtyard of his residence.

Thirty girls, ranging from early to late teens (most of them with pretty faces), were hard at work doing chores throughout the interior of the residence.

Unable to remain calm inside the house, Godou felt forced to come to the courtyard like a father going to the veranda for a smoke.

"The rumors turn out to be completely true. You are only serious in your words."

"I'm not lying, this is honestly what I think. By the way, did you have something to tell me?"

"Yes. Actually, there are guests to see you, master."

Finding their positions on parallel lines which would never meet despite any further discussion, Godou changed the subject. Then the maid left to bring in the guests. Several minutes later...

"I knew it was you two. Finally, we meet up again."

The maid had brought in his two companions.

Naturally, they were Erica Blandelli and Seishuuin Ena.

Although Godou had used Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to transmit news that he was safe and had met Doni, it was impossible to hold conversations like a phone after all.

Godou was glad to be finally reunited with his companions.

As expected of Erica and Ena, they did not encounter any trouble on their way here.

However, the blonde Italian girl looked quite displeased. On the other hand, the black-haired Hime-Miko was making a face as though she had eaten something bitter.

"Why hello, Godou, it's been quite a while... Isn't it wonderful that you're still the same as always?"

"After parting for a matter of days, you've already established this residence, all filled with girls. Your Majesty truly isn't someone who can be left alone to do as you please."

The two girls had apparently toured the mansion thoroughly, witnessing how it was teeming with maids.

Erica was dripping with piercing sarcasm while Ena sighed mournfully. Godou objected in a panic:

"It's not like that. It's just those surrounding people who decided on their own to prepare this for me!"

"This sort of destiny should be called the Kusanagi Godou disease, I suppose. A disease that causes you to die unless you're surrounded by women."

"Surely Your Majesty must have done something to these girls all around you. Definitely."

Then the two of them sighed together.

"L-Let's put this aside first and talk about what happened while we were apart. We need to exchange information, right?"

"You're really poor at changing the subject, Godou. But no matter, indeed you are right. I'll let you off the hook this time."

"Well, after Ena and Erica-san fell off the ship, we quickly got back on land."

"Indeed, we did not suffer much hardship. As soon as the storm subsided, we resumed our journey."

Despite her anger, Erica still acted rationally. The forgiving Ena also did not look like she intended to pursue the matter further.

Gratified by his companions' consideration, Godou explained about Doni and Artio.

"...Then, that guy Doni is now staying with the Frankish warriors and living in what used to be a Roman army outpost."

Roman army outposts were military installations established at many Roman colonial cities.

Doni's subordinates were trying their best to gather Frankish warriors from nearby lands to Colonia Agrippina. Naturally, the outpost was the best location to shelter all these people.

"So, what about Aisha-san... She's also in this city, right?"

"Uh yeah, she's actually..."

"If you wish, should I go and call her here?"

Just as Godou hesitated in answering Ena's matter-of-fact question, the maid went ahead and made a suggestion.

Godou jumped in surprise. On further thought, he realized this matter could easily be misinterpreted. No, he had not done anything against his conscience, so it should be fine—

While he was thinking, the maid left the courtyard to call Madame Aisha.

Then in merely *three minutes*, she rapidly arrived.

"Goodness gracious! Although I've already heard that the two of you are safe and sound, it is truly wonderful that we are reunited again so smoothly without trouble. I am so happy! Hohoho!"

" "....." "

Coming here, Madame Aisha smiled warmly while exclaiming in joy.

However, Erica was glaring at Godou in a terrifying manner while Ena was making a pained expression as though about to exclaim "This again." She replied to the female Campione:

"Yes. Ena and Erica-san are very happy too. But let's put that aside first."

"Oh sure. What may be the matter?"

"It feels like you only traveled for a very short time to pay us a visit, Madame. I was thinking it would take an hour at least, but unbelievably, it turned out to be instant..."

The Madame smiled cheerfully and answered Ena and Erica's question.

"Oh, getting here quickly is only natural. That's because I'm currently living in Kusanagi-san's residence. So if you call me, I'll instantly arrive."

Madame Aisha continued.

"Of course, I felt a little resistant against staying in a man's house, but this place turns out to be a huge mansion. Furthermore, Kusanagi-san threatened me, saying 'you must stay within my sight' with a horrifying expression... So I had no choice."

In actual fact, the Madame was the one who insisted yesterday on staying in this residence. But for some reason, she seemed to be admonishing Godou and he could notice her looking at him with a slightly shy expression.

In addition, even Erica and Ena were glaring at Godou again.

"As expected."

"Although I did consider the possibility of Godou playing around on occasion, it really did turn out this way."

"Ahhh, jeez. That's the kind of person His Majesty is..."

Ena's words were mixed with complicated emotions of anxiety and resignation. On the other hand, Erica sounded like a detective who had discovered important evidence.

Ever since Godou's duel against Uldin, the two girls had become inexplicably in tune with each other.

Godou was surprised by this unexpected discovery. At the same time, he spoke up to defend his honor.

"Uh, I'm sorry to interrupt while you're so engaged in the conversation, but I need to go out a while to handle a necessary task."

Hence, Godou rode his favorite horse and went into the streets of Colonia Agrippina.

However, he was accompanied by three people. The maid from earlier, Erica, as well as Ena. The three girls were riding respectively on horses taken from the stables at Godou's residence.

"Godou really isn't a person who misses out on any opportunity !"

"Who could've expected things to get weird between him and that person..."

"C-Come on. You two should know very well that Madame Aisha is the one who needs to be watched the most closely, right!?"

His two companions were riding behind Godou's horse with the maid slightly further away.

Apart from the maid in the back who dutifully remained silent, the rest of them chatted casually while moving through the Roman colonial city.

Peace was maintained in the city's interior and the citizens were living their lives as usual.

Reportedly, the standing Roman army normally stationed inside Colonia Agrippina was defeated by Salvatore Doni singlehandedly and had retreated already.

At the time, Doni's Frankish subordinates had arrived, resulting in the occupation of the city.

Normally speaking, the Franks would begin to loot, resulting in a great deal of bloodshed among the citizens, with people captured as slaves and towns burned by arson—This kind of tragic scene would be usual, but contrary to Godou's expectations, Doni actually prohibited such atrocities.

"That man turned out to be quite wise in this area, thank goodness..."

While patrolling various parts of the city by horse, Godou muttered to himself.

Seeing the Frankish warriors looking restless in the city, Doni had realized their intentions and had apparently given orders to

prohibit looting from the very start. After all the effort spent in obtaining a stronghold needed to fight a deity, labor should not be wasted unnecessarily. That was how Doni expressed it.

Back in modern Milan, Doni once commanded the [Copper Black Cross].

Godou was surprised to find Doni quite used to leading subordinates. But rather than a general, it would be more accurate to describe him as a bandit boss or a barbarian chief.

"By the way, Your Majesty. By 'necessary task,' you mean patrolling the streets?"

"Yeah. As for why—"

Just as Godou was about to explain the reason to Ena, it so happened that the "reason" took place before their eyes.

As they passed before a bar, three Frankish men with topknots were causing a ruckus inside the shop. It looked like an argument had erupted between them and other customers in the bar.

"Could you help me go stop them?"

"Understood, master."

Under Godou's orders, the maid waiting at the back dismounted swiftly.

Then she entered the bar and spoke a few words to the rioting Frankish men. As a result, the troublemakers instantly stopped,

looked at Kusanagi Godou who was waiting outside, and began to show panic on their faces.

"In other words, Godou, you're watching over the Franks' actions?"

"Well, even with the great chieftain's orders, it's inevitable that people from the conquering side would get cocky. Since that idiot is kind of sloppy with certain details, I was thinking that this kind of incident should be reduced if I let those Franks know that I will patrol around town."

Godou nodded in response to Erica.

Doni and the Frankish warriors were currently at what used to be a Roman army outpost.

The city streets where Godou's group was visiting were located on the Rhine's west bank. In contrast, the outpost's location was on the east bank.

Going back and forth simply required crossing a bridge. Due to irregular bouts of isolation, the Frankish warriors seldom visited the city streets on this side. But still, there were a small number of exceptions as one would expect.

"I have returned, master."

"Sorry for troubling you. Thanks for the help."

"This sort of thing is nothing at all. On the other hand, I did hear something strange."

Returning from the bar, the maid made a slightly displeased look.

"The men were causing trouble just now because they heard someone in the bar bring up disrespectful rumors..."

"Rumors, you say?"

"Yes... Soon, a hero wielding a sword of light shall arrive to vanquish Devil King Salvatore Doni of the Franks, the black-haired ally as well as the witch in white. That was what they said."

"....."

Godou signaled to his two companions with his eyes. The two girls nodded together in response.

"That was the rumor we heard in Augusta Raurica as well."

"Did a rumor spread from that city all the way here? When did Your Majesty and Aisha-san get added in as well... Eh, wait a sec."

After Erica murmured casually, Ena showed a pondering expression.

"This seems like something that Ena heard before somewhere."

"I am also wondering about this rumor. Something about it bothers me regarding that goddess called Artio."

Erica also murmured in deep thought.

Godou only felt that it was a strange coincidence, but the girls apparently found the rumor to be some kind of hint. The blonde Italian girl suddenly proposed a constructive idea.

"In any case, let's visit Sir Salvatore's side next. Godou's patrolling job should be handed over to someone else. Of course, don't ask Sir Salvatore to do it but let me take command instead."

Despite having arrived in this city for less than half a day, Erica was already thinking with such practicality.

Having displayed how nothing less should be expected from the one named Erica Blandelli, she turned to the maid and smiled glamorously.

"I will be returning to the mansion afterwards to get reacquainted with all the other servants. From here on, Ena-san and I shall be the mistresses of the house. You don't mind serving us, do you?"

"Of course not, madam."

The maid bowed her head respectfully.

Thus began their new life in Colonia Agrippina.

Part 3

Later at night, on that day when Erica and Ena met up with Godou...

For the first time in a while, Godou gathered with his companions for dinner together in his residence.

The dishes included salad with olives and broad beans, fruits such as figs and grapes, boiled pork, roasted hare, sausages, grain porridge, deep fried flower bulbs whose name was not known, etc. Quite a sumptuous array of offerings.

Also, there was the casual chatting between Godou and the two girls who were finally reunited with him.

Although it was supposed to be quite a lively occasion, there was the addition of Madame Aisha who was "freeloading" here, as well as the presence of thirty maids to wait on them.

After finishing dinner and escaping to the office reserved for the residence's master, Godou spoke from the bottom of his heart.

"There's too many girls here. I really feel like moving over to live in the soldiers' quarters with Doni and the rest. It's basically all men there..."

The former Roman army outpost was located on the opposite side of the river. Currently, it was where Doni's faction lived for now.

Gathered at Colonia Agrippina, the Franks' women and children were also living in the city.

Most of the men capable of fighting were at the outpost. Apart from women who went there to cook, it was all men and quite a

pig sty. Nevertheless, Godou still envied that sort of environment devoid of females.

Casually sitting down on the desk meant for handling official matters, Godou crossed his legs and spoke:

"I'd feel so much more relaxed in a place with only the smell of men's sweat, like a baseball or soccer club's activities room."

"This is a little difficult for me to understand."

"No matter what, this isn't something you should be saying in front of Ena and Erica-san."

Next to the desk, Erica showed surprise while Ena made a wry expression.

Unlike the rest of the female lineup here, Godou did not feel mentally exhausted when hanging around these two girls. Well, in a certain sense, Madame Aisha was also someone he "did not mind " interacting with.

"It's no big deal, right? I'm actually more able to adjust to that kind of place. Other than that, living like before, just the three of us , would be nice and relaxing too."

"Oh dear, compared to such a grand harem, you're saying that having just Ena-san and me would be better instead?"

"Ehehe... Putting it that way, Ena feels embarrassed by the compliment."

"Oh no, I don't mean anything weird in that."

Seeing the two girls smile suddenly, Godou began to panic.

Then a knocking was heard from the office's door followed by a voice from outside.

"Is everyone inside? To celebrate our safe reunion, let us drink and chat the night away in joy. This is called a free and easy party, hohoho."

Madame Aisha had arrived at the door. Just as Godou was about to reply, Erica took action first. Taking a seat on the desk where Godou was sitting, she moved up close to him and leaned herself intimately against his body before saying:

"Please come in, Madame!"

"Ah yes. Pardon my intrusion."

Seeing Godou who had stiffened from the sudden intimate contact as well as Erica leaning against him, the cheerful Madame froze as she entered the room.

"E-Erica, stop doing weird things!"

"Yes, that's right, Godou. The Madame has come over. —How terribly sorry I am, Madame. Please excuse the unsightly display."

By the time Godou regained his senses, he found that Erica had merely separated slightly from him before apologizing gracefully. Nonchalantly, she placed her hand on top of Godou's while continuing to apologize in a passionate tone of voice:

"Wanting to fill up the lonely void we felt due to our separation with this person—Godou—we impatiently desired privacy for the three of us. Unable to bear it, we hid in this kind of place."

"W-When did I do such a thing!?"

Godou retorted against the blonde beauty whose eyes were lowered in a gaze of ecstasy. Madame Aisha's mouth opened and closed, muttering meaninglessly, apparently speechless.

Nonchalantly ignoring all this, Erica murmured passionately like a lover:

"Seriously... Godou is so shy. Just bear it for a little longer. After a delightful night of chatting with Madame Aisha, we still have enough time. —Ena-san should also understand, right?"

"Ah, yes. Of course, Ena understands, Your Majesty."

Catching the signal from Erica's eyes, Ena spoke abruptly.

Then took a seat on the desk as well, taking up the spot next to Godou—opposite Erica's side—whispering in a stiff tone of voice:

"Although Ena also wants to enjoy Your Majesty's love sooner, Ena is good friends with Aisha-san too and wants to chat over many things. No problem, Ena can wait patiently..."

The Hime-Miko's watery eyes drew near to Godou while she whispered softly.

Caught in the middle between Ena's cuteness and Erica's bold passion, Godou was quite shocked. Meanwhile, Madame Aisha's mouth finally stopped muttering unintelligibly and managed to find words:

"S-S-Sorry, I didn't notice. Th-That's true too. Surely, the three of you must have many things to talk about and apart from that, with this and that to do, you must be very busy tonight. I-I-I will excuse myself now!"

Finishing her speech extremely rapidly, Madame Aisha left the office.

Her face was bright red and her head was bowed low...

"Ehehe... Feels so naughty, like driving her away."

"But it's true that we would like to spend some quality time together, just the three of us. A prank of this level probably shouldn't deserve karmic retribution."

The two girls next to Godou commented respectively.

Furthermore, Erica suddenly brought her lips near Godou's ear and bit him without warning.

"Ouch! W-What are you doing, Erica!?"

"Not like it matters. After all, we originally wanted to say private time for two, but changed it to three people together instead. Consequently, you should be thanking Ena-san and me for our generosity, Godou."

"....."

"For example, you should share the joy of reunion through a kiss."

This time, Erica brought her face and lips close to Godou's lips.

Although he considered evading, Godou did not actually carry through with this thought. He suspected this was because he was already used to it and he could also understand to some extent what the audacious Italian girl was implying.

But as the kiss progressed to the point when both of them were sucking forcefully at each other's lips, one could no longer regard this as one-sided intimate contact that Godou was accepting passively.

"N-Not just Erica-san, Your Majesty..."

After separating from Erica's lips, Godou found Ena's face drawing near this time. However, the Yamato Nadeshiko, who would tend to grow timid in situations like this, did not press her lips towards him no matter what, despite bringing her face close enough for their foreheads to almost touch together.

At the very brink, she was hesitating, still unable to commit her resolve.

The sight of her behavior invited Godou's tender affection. Godou took initiative and kissed her gently, making contact like a light peck. Ena smiled blissfully as a result and pressed her lips against him in the same manner, kissing Godou on her own.

Just as this sweet air of burning passion was produced between the trio of Erica, Ena and Godou—

Sitting on the office desk, the trio was suddenly startled.

"Uh, umm... It's about time we start discussing serious matters, right..."

"Perhaps you are right. D-Discussing the situation is necessary, after all!"

"S-Speaking of which, Erica-san, there's something you find concerning, right!?"

The girls exchanged a few words as though trying to change the mood.

Prior to the battle against Uldin, the trio had engaged in that certain ritual.

This was their first kiss since that event. However, for some reason, it now felt even harder than before to resist the momentum in such behavior... Was that why Erica and Ena both pulled themselves back to regain their senses? This posed a different kind of risk compared to being alone with one of them.

Godou felt his heart pounding madly. Ena was also clearly panicking.

Then Erica coughed drily and finally managed to muster a resolute voice to start talking:

"After listening to what was said, the impression I gathered is that the goddess Artio should be a mother earth goddess. The bear is a totem of the earth, while saying she'll bring her son along is also proof of this fact."

"She's one of Athena's kind?"

"Yes. It is quite common for goddesses linked to the earth mothers' lineages to have a boy or a young man by their side as a companion. This companion is sometimes a lover, sometimes a

brother or follower. However, for this type of myth, in their most ancient form, in most cases it is a 'son'."

Hence she was identified as a mother earth goddess. Godou agreed with Erica's argument.

"If I had to give examples, in Greek mythology, there is the handsome young man Adonis who was loved by the goddess Aphrodite. Godou, you should recall the name of Baal, the divine king who was revived by his sister, the goddess Anat. Then there's the earth goddess Leto's son Apollo... Tracing all the way back to the origins, these are all relationships between earth mother goddesses and their sons."

Erica suddenly lowered her voice at this point.

"In addition, through the passage of time over the ages, the ' mother earth goddess and son' relationship has given rise to another variant, that of 'a woman possessing magical powers along with the hero under her protection'..."

"Hero? Erica-san, you can't be saying...?"

"How sharp of you, Ena-san. The so-called hero is the warrior whose very being could be taken as a metaphor for a 'sword.' Possessing the trait of invulnerability, one who subdues dragons and snakes. The various sword gods. Heretic Gods. These are the heroes that we call the [War Gods of Steel]."

Bringing up the term referring to the war gods who stood as the Campiones' mortal enemies, Erica continued.

"For example, there is the hero Achilles whose invulnerability was conferred by his fairy mother, Thetis. Raised by the Lady of the Lake, Lancelot du Lac also fits the mold."

"Lancelot huh..."

Nostalgically recalling the name of his great rival, Godou could not help but mutter.

"On further thought, these kinds of guys also exist in this era."

"Yes. However, the problem here is King Arthur—the hero that Lancelot and Divine Ancestor Guinevere were seeking. Did you know? The name Arthur evolved from the word 'artos.'"

"What does it mean?"

"Hero. There's also another meaning, bear. Coming from the strongest beast in European forests, the [Bear], that was probably why it took on the meaning of hero, brave and powerful. Furthermore, the name Artio's etymology also comes from Artos."

Saying that, Erica shrugged.

"The name of the goddess Artio carries the meaning of [Bear]. I recall her definitely being a goddess worshiped by the Celts in central Europe. If this goddess has a son, then Artos would surely be his name. Then becoming the hero who later served as King Arthur's prototype—"

"Eh, wait a sec, okay?"

Godou's memory was jogged by the repetition of the two words , Artos and Arthur.

"Didn't Alice-san mention before? King Arthur's legend was a fake myth fabricated by the witches of old. I remember Gascoigne trying to solve the puzzle."

"Indeed. Moreover, Prince Alec has also made the following findings through his investigation—the hero called the 'King of the End' by the Divine Ancestors had descended at one point under the name of Artos during a certain period between the fifth and sixth centuries..."

"....."

"Actually, Ena also thought of something."

The Hime-Miko of the Sword began to speak in an uncharacteristically strange tone of voice.

"Recently, haven't there been rumors of the hero wielding a sword of light to defeat the Devil Kings? Actually, something similar also happened in Japan's Bousou Peninsula, where people spreading rumors of a hero's divine sword would suddenly appear ..."

Queen Oto Tachibana-Hime, jumped into the sea with sword embosomed. Sea currents carried her sword to a location of neither land nor sea, whence a floating island subsequently appeared.

Ena recalled the legend that kept appearing in the land of Bousou.

Reportedly, no matter how many times the History Compilation Committee tried to cover up these rumors, people spreading the rumor still continued to appear.

Godou jumped in surprise. Sayanomiya Kaoru had told him the same thing earlier. In addition, he had also learnt of something else from a certain person—

'Regardless, the location where the 'King of the End' sleeps definitely gives rise to legends about warriors and divine swords.'

'In that case, one would naturally think there was an authentic Floating Island somewhere in Tokyo Bay.'

These were Alexandre Gascoigne's speculations.

The 'King of the End' should be sleeping somewhere in Tokyo Bay, near the Bousou Peninsula.

"Could the goddess Artio's son be King Arthur's prototype—the 'King of the End'?"

Artio—Artos—Arthur. A chain of connections.

The relationship between the 'King of the End' and places where legends surfaced about divine swords and warriors.

Godou muttered due to these details stimulating his imagination. That man was supposed to be the hero who exterminated all godslayers, the existence that Athena once warned him about.

Part 4

The goddess Artio had undoubtedly said:

'In our next encounter, I shall bring my son before you.'

However—Godou began to ponder. After all, subordinate or allied gods summoned by a goddess were not supposed to possess particularly powerful divinities. Nevertheless, if it really were the ' King of the End'...?

"In a fight against that guy, I'd die beyond a doubt. That's what Athena said once."

"Asserted already? That's not so good."

"Whatever, there's no point getting bothered by it. I'll just do the same as always."

"The same as always? Ahhh, you mean naturally getting into a fight."

"At least call it adapting to the situation, Seishuuin..."

This was the morning two days after Godou was reunited with Erica and Ena.

Almost simultaneously with the break of dawn, Godou left the house, accompanied only by Ena. The two of them crossed the Rhine by bridge on horseback, arriving at the opposite shore.

Indeed, they had gone from the city on the west bank over to the east bank—

The opposite shore was where Doni and the Frankish warriors lived in a Roman army outpst.

But apart from that, there were no other major buildings. This was no longer within the city's boundaries, since east of the Rhine was Germania, a land where Roman imperial rule did not extend.

The army outpost was on the east bank in order to intercept enemies coming from Germania.

(As a side note, the current period seemed to be when the Roman Empire had built "great walls" in the interior of Germania to establish frontier fortifications for blocking Germanic invasions. However, the defensive line had retreated to the Rhine's position by this juncture.)

Compared to the west bank with well-equipped urban facilities, the east bank consisted more of undeveloped, natural areas.

If the horses were allowed to gallop for a bit, one would be greeted by the sight of flourishing forests. This area was essentially

a plain. The flat grassland stretched endlessly with rather good visibility.

This sort of scenery with small and medium sized forests scattered sparsely here and there was quite rare in Japan.

Godou and Ena were heading to one of these forests. It was the Hime-Miko's request.

"Ena has been spending all her time in cities recently. Hence, purifying the body and mind is necessary."

Ena spoke cheerfully. The two of them walked amidst the dense coniferous trees as well as deciduous trees such as oak, white oak and beech, strolling under them casually. Before stepping foot inside the forest, they had tied their horses outside.

Summoning a god's energy into one's body was the secret art of divine possession—

As the user of this technique, Ena regularly distanced herself from civilization to purify her body and mind using the spiritual energy deep in the mountains.

"So even in this era, you're still able to receive power from that old man Susanoo?"

"Ena only tried it out as a test without much hope. It seems like there is a weak connection between this time period and our present... Looks like it's really possible."

"A weak connection?"

Godou could not help but mutter. In response, Ena gave an unexpected answer.

"Yes, although Aisha-san's corridor appears to manifest only once a month, Ena thinks that it isn't totally gone during this time. It's just that it's invisible to the human eye and its ability to transmit things is weakened."

"....."

"Probably, 'subtle things' like spiritual energy and magical power can still be transmitted between this and the modern era. Ena thinks that's why divine possession can be used."

"But is it okay for me to be here? If you're trying to purify your body and mind, being alone should be better, right?"

"What are you talking about, Your Majesty? Hey, on the last trip to Uldin-san's place, didn't Your Majesty travel together with Erica-san as a pair? So this sort of counts as compensation."

"S-So that's what this is about?"

"Yes. That's why Erica-san didn't come along. How considerate of her... Well, her trouble with getting up early in the morning is also partly the reason."

"That girl is always so lethargic in the mornings..."

The pair walked in the forest, advancing deeper.

The spring breeze, blowing through the trees, felt pleasant beyond belief. Streaming through gaps between the leaves, the sunlight was bright and dazzling. Rather than purifying one's body and mind, this felt more like a countryside outing.

Soon after, Godou and Ena reached the edge of a spring.

The size was roughly the same as the school swimming pool. The spring water was so clear and pristine that the sight was simply touching.

"It's so unbelievably clean that I wouldn't be surprised even if a fairy or two lived here."

"Coming from Your Majesty, that's completely not strange at all—Look, it feels great!"

Laughing at Godou's words, Ena took off her boots and stepped into the spring water.

The coldness of the spring water felt refreshing, resulting in carefree laughter—But suddenly, she cried out "Ah."

"Speaking of water, Ena now remembers. Ena was chatting with Aisha-san yesterday, right, along with Erica-san. It was something mentioned at the time."

"Something related to water?"

"Yes. She said that after drifting in the river with Your Majesty, she was trying to dry her drenched clothes and you ended up seeing her naked body. When we were asking Aisha-san about

what happened after we were separated, she acted very suspiciously. However, Erica-san managed to get it out of her."

"Hold on! Many things are wrong with that explanation!"

It was an event that was quite difficult to talk about. Couldn't she have expressed it in a slightly more prudent manner?

Believing he needed to defend his honor, Godou loudly protested.

"Things only turned out that way because we were both careless . It felt more like an unfortunate accident!"

"Well, Ena thought so too."

Ena gazed at Godou with a face like a sulking child's.

Then she suddenly took out a ribbon and tied her long, silky, black hair into a ponytail. After she walked into the shadows of some nearby trees, out of Godou's sight—The rustling of undressing could be heard.

"!? Seishuuin, what on earth are you doing!?"

"B-Because Ena is here to purify her body and mind..."

Ena answered from the shade in a stiff tone of voice. Then a splash followed immediately. Having removed all her clothes, Ena had entered the spring water.

"Seishuuin, what are you doing!? I'm right here on the side!"

"S-Sorry. Looks like Ena got careless as well... N-No, Your Majesty is at fault too. To think you'd stand in this kind of place, th-that's called carelessness too, right...?"

"....."

"B-But being even more careless and taking a longer look is okay too, you know...? Like the time with Aisha-san, it's just an accident, right?"

Waded into the spring water at chest height, Ena spoke quietly.

She was separated from Godou at the spring's edge by only five or six meters at most. Furthermore, the transparency of this spring water was rather high.

Hence, even her body *from the chest down* was clearly visible under the water.

Godou had witnessed the same at the Chuuzenji hot spring before, the sight of Ena's complete nudity.

Despite a voluptuous figure rivaling Erica's, with all the curves in the right places, Ena huddled her body and her pale skin became flushed red. Naturally, this was due to embarrassment.

The Hime-Miko of the Sword was now sitting on an underwater rock.

Perhaps still indecisive? She was using her arms to cover her bountiful bosom.

Gazing upwards at Godou in a coy manner, Ena had tied up her silky black hair in a ponytail for the very first time, exuding a kind of charm different from her usual liveliness.

Thanks to that, Godou was unable to tear his gaze away from the embarrassed Ena.

"Ah. Ena's very sorry recently, Your Majesty."

"Eh? I don't think there's anything you need to apologize for, is there?"

"There is. Recently, Ena seems to have nagged at Your Majesty a lot—Due to another increase in girls, Ena is feeling jealous... Sorry, Ena was supposed to be more calm in the first place."

Sitting in the spring, Ena bowed her head despondently.

As a result, she lowered her arms and the breasts she had been covering became completely clear to view.

"Ena feels a slightly heart-wrenching feeling. It's fine when it's Erica-san, Yuri or Liliana-san, but Ena feels very unpleasant when other girls get near Your Majesty..."

"S-Seishuuin."

This was a jealous side that did not quite suit the bright and cheerful child of nature.

Hearing this confession, Godou felt compelled to give Ena a hug, so he took a step forward.

Walking any further forward would mean stepping into the spring. Nevertheless, driven by an impulse to shower the

Hime-Miko with tender affection, he did not mind and was just about to approach closer—At that very instant...

Even though it was clearly in the early morning hours, the sky suddenly went pitch black.

Despite being in a forest, Godou was currently in a wide open space, being next to a spring. Gentle sunlight was supposed to be shining down, illuminating the clear spring water and the forest air.

" "!?" "

Godou and Ena looked up into the sky and were surprised at the same time.

"The sun—It's gone dark!"

"A-An eclipse?"

Before they knew it, the morning sun had turned black, becoming a circle of blackness.

The circle was ringed by a white halo. The sky was pitch black, almost like the scene of a total solar eclipse. This occurred despite the fact that no impending signs of large-scale astronomical phenomena were sensed!

Furthermore, accompanied by a crash of thunder, white lightning descended from the dark sky to strike the ground.

From Godou and Ena's location, the black sun lay to the east. The flash of lightning gave off extremely powerful magical power.

'—It's here.'

Suddenly speaking softly was Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi from Godou's right arm.

'My kindred, the blade born from the star of [Steel] has crash landed. Although its origin is unclear, it is surely a horrifying and sharp sword. King, miko, best to beware.'

"Ama no Murakumo, do you know where it fell?"

Ena exposed her gorgeous nude body while rising from the water.

Bearing a nervous and commanding expression, she came over to Godou's side and asked her steel partner.

'The approximate location is—'

Godou and Ena exchanged a glance then nodded respectively.

Beneath the still-dark sky and the eclipsed sun...

After Ena had put on her clothes again, Godou and Ena were currently riding their horses in a gallop.

Following Ama no Murakumo's guidance, they moved northeast. Unlike Gaul, Germania on the Rhine's east bank was an undeveloped region. Forests were especially numerous in this area . It was also a forest region frequently used by royalty and nobles as a hunting ground ever since medieval times.

However, Godou and Ena were currently riding across a plain where there were few hindrances to visibility.

Hence, even as novice riders, Godou and Ena still managed to traverse the plain without problems. Soon after, the sound of equestrian hooves could be heard from the rear. Three riders were galloping on horseback to catch up.

"Ah, Godou, you're here too!"

"You're heading to the place where the lightning descended, right?"

Finally caught up, Doni greeted Godou who replied with a question.

The Campione standing as Europe's strongest swordsman also seemed to be a skilled equestrian and was displaying superb riding form. The same need not be said for Erica whose horse was galloping alongside. To Godou's surprise, even Madame Aisha was also riding skillfully.

"Yes. The sky turning into this would be clearly very unusual, right? Intending to investigate the powerful presence of magical

power that descended just now, I left the city and came over with the two of them."

Erica explained in response. Presumably, she had used magic to divine which direction to pursue. Anyone could tell that the three riders who caught up from behind were very skilled equestrians.

"To think it would be at such a time, could Artio-san have done something...?"

Murmuring in this manner, Madame Aisha was dressed in clothing facilitating mobility for once. Instead of a one-piece dress, she was wearing knee-length pants with her usual white overcoat on top.

This was probably for riding more conveniently. Most likely, she was already used to traveling on horse.

"Come to think of it, Aisha-san, you mentioned about crossing deserts by camel before, right?"

"Yes. I've also ridden horses all over South Dakota during the Wild West era."

She happily revealed her past exploits. As expected of the expert traveler who had traversed the world, oriental and occidental, past and present.

Allowing their horses to take occasional breaks, the five of them hurried northeast. The trip was guided by Erica's magic and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Not long after that, a small hill appeared before them.

White, rectangular pillars of stone were arranged in a circle there.

Similar to England's Stonehenge, it was a historic site known as a stone circle.

The nearer they approached the stone circle, the more Godou's body and mind filled up with power for battle. As expected, the goddess Artio emerged from the depths of the stone monument.

Wearing a bear pelt, the beautiful goddess looked down at the world below from atop the hill.

Imperceptibly, the black sun had moved to what would be the very center of the sky.

The time was estimated to be noon. Dismounting several hundred meters from the hill, Godou signaled to Erica and Ena with his eyes. From this point on, only the three of us should proceed—That was what he conveyed.

Comprehending his message, the two companions stopped their horses to wait on standby.

Conversely, Doni and Madame Aisha dismounted.

One of the three Campiones, who knows which one, started walking towards the stone ring's hill.

"I don't have any intention of fighting in a group of three. It's just that something weird is going on in this area, so the three of us came to check it out..."

Standing at the foot of the mountain and speaking to Artio, that person was Doni, of course.

"Who should take the fight? Having a deciding match here first sounds like a good idea."

"What are you talking about, Doni-san? Even if she is a deity bringing calamity, it is not right to slay her without saying a word. It is more appropriate to have a calm discussion first, making compromises where possible. Bloodshed should be avoided as thoroughly as possible."

"In contrast to your proposal, Aisha-san, you've already defeated quite a few gods..."

Godou could not help but point out the inconsistency. Perhaps because this was a question that had been weighing on his mind a long time already.

"Although you keep saying stuff like how you're not good at fighting, in contrast, you've already defeated one, two... at least four or more deities."

"Oh Godou, you didn't know? Madame Aisha fights in quite a sly manner."

"Eh? Although I've slightly guessed this much already, is it really that amazing?"

"W-What are the two of you talking about!? There was never a battle I wanted to fight in. I always felt bad after every victory!"

Under unusual conditions akin to total solar eclipse, with a goddess ahead, expected to counterattack any moment...

Nevertheless, none of the three Campiones said anything serious. They simply took things in stride and faced the situation as usual.

On the other hand, this was different from a lack of tension. Godou and Doni were gazing sharply uphill. Facing off against a deity, their bodies and minds were filled with concentration and power unique to Campiones.

It was probably the same for Madame Aisha. In a rare moment, she was also displaying a solemn expression.

On the other hand, the goddess waiting to strike at the three Campiones...

"You came as expected, godslayers."

Solemnly, her beautiful face tensed up and she closed her eyes.

"The three of you, in addition to those located in distant lands... Four, five... a total of six godslayers existing in this present world. How lamentable beyond compare."

Still with her eyes closed, Artio murmured.

She was apparently watching the state of the world illustrated beneath her eyelids, thereby counting the number of Campiones. What kind of ability did she rely on to obtain such clairvoyance?

"In that case, given my injured state, exterminating all six would be quite a challenging task. Even if my son were to be summoned, it would probably fail to make a difference in the situation..."

Summoning her son. Did she mean summoning a subordinate god?

After ruling out the idea of a summon, Artio haughtily gazed down at the godslayer trio.

"Be that as it may, I am not completely bereft of options. If the one who stands as my son's proxy—the Devil King-exterminating hero—manifested to confront you godslayers... Hoho, the victorious side should prove difficult to predict, yes?"

In other words, whom the goddess wanted to summon was not her true son!?

As Godou watched in surprise, Artio smiled gracefully, standing on the hill.

"O great king who commands equestrian tribes and dragons. O king, adept user of black magic and the dark arts. O wandering king who begrudges mankind. In addition, O king who indulges in merrymaking with but a lone sword. O young king, bringer of storms and calamity. O queen of turmoil, coming from the mysterious cave..."

Artio's eyes suddenly opened as she raised both arms up high towards the heavens.

Sparks flew between her hands. White lightning. This was the same light that had struck the earth a few hours earlier just as the solar eclipse started.

"With the six of you gathered upon the earth, this is clearly this era's end. One could verily call it the end times."

Beneath the dark sky, Artio's chanting could be heard sonorously.

She looked very much like a queen of justice, lamenting the degeneracy of the earth in her speech, a sight filled with awe-inspiring beauty. White lightning continued to increase in brightness between her hands without pause.

Godou also noticed something else.

A sword was hanging at Artio's waist. A sheathed longsword.

"For the sake of severing this darkness of the end times, to exterminate the godslaying Devil Kings, I pray for this sword's

rebirth. Ahhh, most exalted sword of swords, the blade of blades. You are the blade that annihilates Devil Kings. You are the white light of salvation. You are the one born to slaughter each and every one of the Rakshasa!"

Artio finally put down her hands.

Above her head, shining white lightning continued to hover in the air.

Raising her right arm, Artio suddenly drew the longsword from her waist. The sword's blade measured about 100cm in actual length. The double-edged blade was thick and heavy, structured like a woodcutter's chopper.

However, it was utterly decrepit and covered with rust.

"!? It's that sword!?"

Godou had seen this sword once before.

The decrepit divine sword that Alexandre Gascoigne had prepared on the floating island in Tokyo Bay. The remains of the sword worn by the "King of the End."

The enemy, Lancelot, had used these remains as the materials for the lance to engage Godou in a deadly battle!

"The one unblunted and unapproachable, oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

Godou called out the spell words. If the goddess were allowed to finish her chant, they would be in for a bad situation.

Heeding the warnings from his instinct, Godou summoned the [Boar], sending out thoughts to pulverize the hill where the goddess stood, accompanied by the intent of interrupting the strange ritual. However, wind started to blow at the same time.

First came a whirlwind which soon intensified to become a violent storm.

The storm blew in the surroundings of Artio's hill, tracing out a circular shape, becoming a tornado.

Intending to break through this violent tornado to charge at the hill, the [Boar] jumped as hard as it could.

ROOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

However, the instant the [Boar]'s tusks pierced into the tornado, acute noises were heard while sparks exploded.

Then the twenty-meter-long giant boar was sent flying by the tornado.

Nevertheless, the quadrupedal [Boar] had a very low center of gravity and its massive body was quite agile. Even when blown away, it still regained balance nonchalantly and charged the tornado again—Crash!

Acute noises were heard again as the tusks struck the tornado. This sounded like steel clashing into each other.

Then the [Boar] was sent flying again. Again, it regained balance...

The proud boar's charges were thwarted twice. Godou's black avatar made low growls and glared viciously at the tornado barrier on the goddess's hill.

"...A smell of iron in the air?"

Godou noticed a distinct smell of rust filling the atmosphere.

The smell had drifted over from the tornado ahead. In his right arm, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi went 'Hmm?' quietly.

'Beware, king. That divine wind was not summoned by an authority. Rather, it is undoubtedly a wind god—moreover, a hybrid god related to the lineages of [Steel].'

Since they were currently in a battle, the sword had become talkative again for once. Godou listened closely. As a wind god but also a war god of steel at the same time, a hybrid without discernible coherence, what kind of origins would this god have?

"Heh. Not only us, but the other side also wants to gather enough numbers huh."

"I-Indeed, including the 'son' mentioned by Artio-san, they will also have three gathered on their side, becoming three against three!"

Doni muttered with great apparent interest while Aisha cried out with a face full of worry.

The [Boar] lowered its posture to prepare an all-out charge, readying its stance and gathering power. Also, Godou stared at the hill that was protected by the war god of wind and steel.

The goddess Artio had stabbed the longsword into the ground.

White sparks erupted from the lightning above her head as it was sucked into the sword.

"As a goddess of earth, I ratify the ancient covenant for the sake of vanquishing the terrifying Devil Kings. To you, I entrust part of my life as well as the protection conferred upon my son Artos."

Next, the goddess's arm split open automatically, spurting out a great volume of fresh blood.

The blood fell on the longsword's blade, stabbed into the ground, and was instantly absorbed.

"Sacred king manifesting at this era's end, I beseech you to arrive now!"

Accompanied by the final spell words, a slender youth appeared at the same time.

With his back to Godou and the rest, the youth faced his summoner the goddess. Then he slowly looked back to gaze down upon the three Campiones from his position atop the hill.

The youth's hair was deathly white.

His long bangs was obscuring his face.

Nevertheless, one could see his high nasal bridge, well-proportioned mouth and sharp chin. Undoubtedly, it was a handsome face. He was wearing a simple blue tunic with pants of the same color and something like a white cape on top.

The [Boar] intended to go all-out and charge at the hill where the youth and the goddess stood.

However, Godou transmitted thoughts of "observe the situation a little first" to it. The black divine beast made low growls in the depths of its throat and stopped reluctantly, responding to his orders.

"You have come, 'King of the End.' The heavenly child of destiny——Ah."

Artio called out from behind the youth. But while she was speaking, a rumble of thunder prevented his name from being heard.

"....."

"Are you trying to conceal your name? Oh what a finicky man as rumored."

"....."

"Very well. In that case, I shall address you as Artos. This is the sacred name supposed to be granted unto my son. Given your prestige, it is rather fitting."

Artio kept speaking to the silent and expressionless youth.

Was it due to the incredible powers of the gods? They seemed to be capable of interacting. What a strange conversation indeed.

"O Artos, I have but one wish. Exterminate all godslayers in the present era!"

"....."

Hearing the summoner's request, the 'King of the End' reached out.

What he grabbed was the longsword that had just been stabbed into the ground—Its hilt. Then he pulled it out.

In this very instant, the sun in the sky recovered its brightness once more.

Unbelievably, the total solar eclipse was terminated instantaneously. Dazzling radiance scattered upon the sword.

The blade measured roughly 100cm, its construction as thick and heavy as a woodcutter's chopper. Right now, the sword was completely free of rust, shining with platinum luster.

This was precisely the Divine Sword of Salvation. The blade of Devil King extermination had finally revived!

The pale-haired hero turned the divine sword up, raising its blade towards the heavens. Next, a platinum-colored sphere of light manifested high up in the air. The dazzling brightness was as though a second sun had appeared.

Having personally experienced the terrifying effects of this divine sword, Godou knew that certain death awaited them if countermeasures were not enacted instantly.

At the same time, the two Campiones beside him had already started taking action.

"You don't need to endure anymore, go on a full offensive as you please! You too, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, prepare to use Athena's sword!"

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

'Affirmative!'

"O silver arm, upon my oath, turn into the invincible blade!"

"When time is not ripe yet for good to result, even the benevolent shall encounter misfortune, when time is ripe for good to result, fortune shall come to pass... Until the goddess bringing calamity to the people is defeated, please grant protection—!"

Godou ordered the [Boar] to charge at full power while instructing his partner the divine sword to prepare to attack.

Doni's right arm turned silver and poured magical power into the longsword in his hand.

Madame Aisha also chanted spell words to pray for protection. Rather than combat, she probably intended to withdraw from the fray.

Then in the following instant, the white sun descended from high above.

Whether Godou, Doni or Madame Aisha, they all invoked the authorities and magical power they possessed, intending to repel the Divine Sword of Salvation's attack. However—

Not long after the Divine Sword of Salvation caused the platinum-colored sun to descend...

A large hole, dozens of meters wide in diameter, was opened up where the three Campiones had been standing until just now. This hole was dug deep into the ground, to a depth that would not be ludicrous to call the bottom of the earth.

The [Boar] had charged full speed at the hill with all its strength . Its gigantic body had also disappeared as well.

This was the result of the Divine Sword of Salvation piercing the earth.

Furthermore, not a single Campione remained on the ground here. Swallowed by the platinum light of the divine sword, the trio had vanished into thin air.

Chapter 4 - War God Artos and the Divine Sword of Salvation

Part 1

It was said that Devil King John Pluto Smith had received a request.

One that hoped he could exterminate Kusanagi Godou, Salvatore Doni and Madame Aisha, all three of them.

"And now, somewhere around here should be where the radical petitioner lives."

This was inside the ancient Greek temple where Liliana and Yuri had finally arrived through Princess Alice's guidance. However, their guide, the princess, was no longer present anymore.

Ordered by Smith to wait outside, she reluctantly agreed.

After entering the temple, a staircase leading downwards immediately entered into view.

"Authorities capable of time traveling are not limited to Madame Aisha alone. Gods or fairies possessing 'traveling' authorities can accomplish the same. They are able to traverse time and visit alternate realms as though walking on the ground."

Smith explained while descending the steps.

Following behind him together with Yuri, Liliana nodded. Gods possessing traveling authorities. Examples included Greek mythology's Hermes, Japan's three-legged crow Yatagarasu and the god Sarutahiko, etc.[2]

"There actually exist cases when people were swept into the past as a result of mischief by these kinds of gods. However, they absolutely do not cause history altering incidents."

"So... I see."

Yuri chimed in, having awakened from her hypnotized state just earlier.

"The flow of time carries a cruel and merciless power. Even the modification of history through personal coincidence or miracles, resulting in 'something that should not be,' is absolutely forbidden. .."

Smith nodded at the Hime-Miko who was seemingly whispering these words due to spirit vision.

"Precisely. But merciless the flow of time may be, incorrigible changes do happen apparently in extremely rare cases. When such situations arise, it's time for the 'watcher' to enter the stage."

"So, supposing a situation came up where 'history correction' could not occur..."

Unable to quell her curiosity, Liliana tried asking:

"What will happen as a result?"

"Because this sort of thing is unprecedented, I'm not too sure either. Perhaps it might produce a parallel world as suggested in works of science fiction. The era we live in might be altered dramatically, resulting in a tragedy no different from the world's destruction. At any rate, I really have no desire to experiment."

Just as Smith finished, they finally reached the end of the staircase. The basement of the temple was a long corridor, wide and spacious, measuring almost eight meters in width.

"A labyrinth...?"

Liliana felt strange. The endpoint of the underground corridor was completely out of sight.

Not only did this path stretch endlessly, there were quite a few branches. It was as convoluted and complicated as a maze. Also, for some unknown reason, large numbers of stone tablets were hovering in the air. It was essentially a zero gravity space.

Countless stone tablets floated gently in the corridor, drifting all around.

"Could this be the monument of memories—?"

Yuri looked worriedly at the stone tablets.

Floating in midair, the stone tablets were not all rectangular in shape but also included square ones. The tablets nearby were roughly forty to fifty centimeters in size. Every stone tablet had

long passages of ancient script recorded on them. These characters were written densely from end to end, leaving almost no space remaining.

From Liliana's first impressions, the language was Ancient Latin .

"Then let's continue."

Smith resumed walking, causing Liliana and Yuri to follow in a fluster.

Hovering in front of the masked Campione was an orange flame.

Like a fairy guiding them along the right path, this flame flew around slowly while Smith followed it.

Floating in the air, the stone tablets drifted lightly, evading people automatically.

John Pluto Smith's iron-studded boots would regularly knock on the floor with every step he took. Following this sound, Liliana advanced while feeling perplexed.

Inside her mind, many different images were surfacing—

The great river of time, never ceasing in its flow. History. Human life. Hungry people. Well-fed people. Those who were deceived, robbed, or murdered. People engaged in prayer, rescue or love. Doers of good. Doers of evil. Mediocre people. Ambition and hope, dreams and setbacks. Valuable lives, worthless deaths.

...These were probably accumulated memories about humans.

Yuri frequently turned her gaze back and forth from left to right , looking rather hesitant.

"Mariya Yuri, you too—"

"Y-Yes. I can see many things as well."

These images really were revelations obtained via spirit vision. And the signal source was—Using a witch's intuition, Liliana stared intently.

She stared at these numerous tablets of stone, floating in the underground corridor.

"Smith-sama, what exactly are these...?"

"For witches like you, what happens is you are reading the memories of the void floating in the Astral Plane, thereby receiving spirit vision revelations."

The masked godslayer replied as Liliana finally asked her question.

"The stone tablets collected in this residence... are precisely records of that information."

"!?"

"The world of the living, the world of the immortal gods, the boundary of life and immortality—What you call the [Memories of the Void] are the records taken of what transpires in these three realms, both in the past and in the future. Since you are here in this place for safekeeping them, the stimulation of your spirit senses is only logical."

"As expected, that is what is going on..."

Compared to Liliana's speechlessness, Yuri made a look of slight comprehension.

"Spirit vision users can interpret it as seeing into the future. More precisely, it is an ability that involves using your spirit senses to read 'what has already happened,' then subconsciously predicting 'what will happen in the future'—That was what the man in charge of this place said."

"This person is the watcher of time, the master of Plutarch's Residence, right?"

"He wants Godou-san and the others to be eliminated..."

"He must be in quite a difficult position. In actual fact, his standpoint is worthy of sympathy."

In response to Liliana and Yuri's comments, the masked hero shook his head wryly.

"By human standards, he is one who has transcended. Liberated from the limitations of lifespan, possessing power that dwarfs

typical magi. But even so, he is not a god. Neither is he a godslayer . At any rate, he is nowhere as out of bounds as my peer or I."

John Pluto Smith spoke in a truly sly manner while walking along the corridor.

"For the past century and a half, a certain female existence has been giving him great trouble all this time. As both a Campione and a time traveler, she is also a superhuman who can effortlessly alter history that must not be changed easily... Oh well, once you meet him, you'll understand."

A metal door could be seen ahead.

Smith opened it. Instead of a passage, behind the door was a room.

Inside this room, stone tablets were scattered all over the floor instead of floating in midair. Due to the great number of tablets that were haphazardly distributed, finding a place to stand was not easy.

In the center of the room, an old man with white hair and beard was facing a tripod-style easel.

However, placed on the easel was not canvas but one of the stone tablets. The old man was dressed in an ancient Roman toga with a bronze pen in his hand.

"New Year's Eve on this year... The Suebi and the Vandals will assist Alani cavalry to pass through the outskirts of Mogontiacum..

. The Burgundian king and his people have already crossed over to the Rhine's left bank and started interfering in Gaul's affairs... Soon after, the Goths will also arrive..."

The old man muttered softly while staring at the stone tablet.

"But three barbaric kings have already gathered in that place— In any case, this again requires corrections, corrections, corrections followed by nonstop corrections! Alas! This work is lamentable beyond compare!"

The old man finally broke down and roared with great intensity of emotion.

He even turned his wrath towards John Pluto Smith who had entered the room without consent.

"Listen well, king. This old man is utterly annoyed with this work. The history that we humans have compiled to this date is being rewritten again."

Despite seeing Yuri and Liliana following Smith into the room, the old man did not seem to care.

He simply glanced at them before turning his gaze back to the stone tablet.

Smith shrugged ostentatiously and spoke in a joking tone of voice:

"As much as you say that, you are still the guardian of time, eliminating traces of history's corrections and keeping records.

Sometimes, you even head off to the past so as to intervene in history."

Head off to the past. These words greatly surprised Liliana and Yuri.

"Why don't you drop the personal emotions and dedicate your efforts to work? This is called the duty of labor."

"Indeed, so it is! But historical correction happens to be a rare event. Not to mention, there has not even been three incidents in the past millennia requiring this old man to personally visit the past. Someone being sent to the past by some trick of destiny and changing history is meant to be an exceedingly rare event!"

The old man's shoulders shook from rage as he muttered on.

"But that woman continually changes history on mere whim. She truly does not consider at all how great an effect her actions would make on the future! Not even once did she consider! Moreover, to think that three godslayers have traveled to the past this time!"

"In that case, you can fly over to that era and personally put a stop to their actions."

"You should know very well already. This old man's power is not enough to obstruct the barbaric likes of godslayers!"

"So you are asking me to kill three Campiones all at once?"

"Indeed! Aisha of Alexandria, Salvatore Doni of Siena and Kusanagi Godou of the Japan nation. You must hurry before they cause even more distortions in the passage of history!"

These were violent words directed towards three godslayers of the present generation, naming them explicitly. Liliana was particularly displeased by the request to kill Kusanagi Godou. Nevertheless, her curiosity was greatly piqued as a result.

Who exactly was this old man? The instant this question went through her mind, a number of images surfaced.

—An immortal but not a god. A person who had been liberated from the limitations of lifespan.

—A great historian in the past, a sage highly adept in the occult. Currently, he was the [Monument]'s administrator overseeing the carving of the Akashic records, the compiler of what proper history was supposed to be.

So, what was meant by proper history?

"When the actions of someone traveling from the future to the past causes giant distortions in history, proper history results by applying the smallest possible correction..."

Liliana's lips whispered on their own. Speaking of which, Kusanagi Godou had told her before.

At the god Susanoo's hut in the Netherworld, he had encountered beings who were not gods but had spirit powers

exceeding ordinary humans. He remembered there seemed to be a black-clad monk there. This old man in a toga was probably someone belonging to the same category.

Also, Liliana noticed something as well.

She was told that outstanding users of spirit vision were able to instantly obtain spirit visions in the Astral Plane to answer their questions. So this explained it. As the storehouse for these [Memories of the Void], this place offered spirit visions far more easily than any other location. That was why even she was able to do it!

Liliana looked to the Hime-Miko beside her. Yuri nodded in response.

"Here in this place, carving time onto tablets..."

Accompanied by these spell words said by Yuri, one of the stone tablets scattered on the floor hovered into the air.

Among the large amount of Ancient Latin carved on it, Liliana discovered a certain passage.

'John Pluto Smith, accompanied by the duo of Mariya Yuri and Liliana Kranjcar, paid a visit to Plutarch's Residence.'

This was a record of "what had happened" at this place, summoned by Yuri from somewhere using spirit vision. On the other hand, John Pluto Smith spoke up:

"But Venerable One, how on earth am I going to kill the three you requested? Are you suggesting that a time corridor be opened to send me to their era?"

Hearing the masked godslayer laugh maliciously, the old man went "hmph" and frowned.

"This old man is not stupid enough to send a fourth troublemaker to an era where three of them are present already. King, you too, are an illegitimate son of Epimetheus. Undoubtedly, you will disrupt the flow of time when you roam the past, causing history to be rewritten."

"Wise judgment indeed, Venerable One."

Faced with such rude accusations, the masked Devil King simply smiled and shook his head.

"Regarding matters of disrupting the peace of the world, I am proudly confident that my ability is no less than any of my peers. But the mission is a tall order. Killing them should be impossible like this."

"Use what is at your hip—Just fire the arrows of Artemis."

"Uh-huh."

"Using the authority of arrows that you possess, you can shoot through a time corridor to strike targets, right?"

Liliana gasped. The old man spoke the truth—She knew through spirit vision.

From the goddess of the hunt, Artemis, Smith had usurped the authority of the magic projectile.

Due to having only six shots per lunar cycle, it was severely restricted in terms of firing rate. Conversely, the powers residing in the magic projectiles were strong and greatly varied. In a situation of super long distance sniping, it could even be used to snipe an enemy in Europe, all the way from North America.

With this old man's guidance, it was possible to fire a magic bullet from the Astral Plane into an era in the past—

However, Smith shrugged in an exaggerated manner.

"Do you really think it will succeed...? I can't guarantee a kill, neither do I have that sort of confidence. You should know how hardy and resilient Campiones are as a race, right? I don't mind taking a gamble, but surely they will be able to dodge metal bullets falling from the sky, no matter what? Alternatively, the bullet will graze past them in a stroke of luck."

"Hmm."

"Or rather, once they learn of the existence of an unknown sniper, wouldn't they cause new commotions as a result of

heightened wariness? Ultimately, causing great chaos one cannot predict... I am rather reluctant to imagine. Presumably, history will be altered once or twice again?"

The old man groaned, probably unable to offer a rebuttal.

In reaction, John Pluto Smith spoke in a calm voice.

"Rather than doing that, I've got an idea. For example, how about sending these two miko over to the era where the three Devil Kings are visiting? They are Kusanagi Godou's close aides."

He waved his hand rapidly in a motion to recommend Yuri and Liliana.

As usual, Smith's actions were as exaggerated and magnificent as a theater performer's.

"Among the three problematic characters, that man behaves the most seriously. Well, left to his own devices, on the other hand, he's actually not that different from the other two. However, given the presence of supporters to guide his path, he can contribute towards cleaning up the situation—That is what one can hope."

"Indeed that is possible, but ultimately, I still say no!"

Liliana and Yuri's eyes flashed.

It turned out that John Pluto Smith had brought the two of them here with the intention of sending them to the past. However, the toga-clad old man refused vehemently.

"That man is talented as a magnificent villain, capable of turning times of prosperity and peace into chaos, then taking advantage of chaotic times to seize the throne. Sending supporters over to a man like that would be utterly frightening!"

"...Now that you mention it, that does sound quite true..."

"...N-No, Liliana-san. Although it is quite true that for Godou-san as a person, the word 'chaos' does suit him rather well..."

Knowing Kusanagi Godou's character better than anyone else, Liliana could not help but murmur. Yuri's reprimands did not carry any anger, presumably for the same reason.

But since this old man possessed the power to open the door to the past, his help was necessary after all.

Just as Liliana exchanged nods with Yuri and was about to speak up to persuade the old man...

"Hmm...?"

The bronze pen left the old man's hand automatically and floated into the air. Then it moved on its own and began to write on the stone tablet that was placed on the easel.

"The great hero's arrival... To think it has been hastened fifty-two years ahead of time?"

Taking one glance at the content written out by the automatic pen, the old man was greatly stunned.

"Alas, O child of heaven, O sacred child of heaven descending upon the earth. That must not happen... A change that must not appear. Otherwise, historical correction henceforth will be quite difficult... No, if the situation could be cleaned up at this stage, perhaps—"

Then there was a long silence. Minutes later...

The old man finally looked up and rested his gaze on Liliana and Yuri for the first time.

"Girls who may serve to guide the king. Now that things have come to this, is there no other choice...?"

Did a critical emergency arise? The old man shrugged his shoulders while he spoke.

"But let me state first for the record. This old man can open a time corridor to send the two of you there. However, that is as far as my help extends."

"...After arriving in the past, we have no one to depend on but ourselves?"

Speaking up a step before the masked Devil King, Liliana asked her question.

Smith had already gone out of his way to bring them here. However, considering the fact that only the two of them were

going to proceed from this point onwards, she must depend on her own wits to ponder the necessary preparations. One could not keep relying on others forever. This concerned a knight's honor.

"Indeed. Manifested in the land where you will be sent to is the heavenly child of destiny... The hero who exterminates Devil Kings . In your era, he is known as the 'King of the End'."

"—the 'King of the End'!"

Throughout the battles against the Witch Queen Guinevere and the war god Lancelot, this title had been heard many times.

The old man in the toga nodded at the speechless Liliana.

"To this date, that heavenly child has descended a number of times on earth and engaged the godslayers in battle. He also manifested in the land of Gaul during what your calendar would date as 458 CE. Back then, this heavenly child fought repeatedly all over Europe, even going as far as to cross over to Britain. After a long series of battles, he finally exterminated all the Devil Kings of that time period."

"....."

"But now, a monumental change has occurred in history. The ' King of the End' has descended fifty-two years too early, hence becoming a trigger producing historical change—Quite difficult to correct. If Her Highness Aisha and His Highness Kusanagi could make him lie dormant temporarily..."

"This message needs to be passed along to Kusanagi Godou, right?"

"Yes. However, the one who awakened the heavenly child is the goddess Artio, entrusted with the grudges and curses of the innocent populace. This will likely be a difficult mission."

The old man bowed his head wearily while he spoke.

"A journey to the past itself is already accompanied by hardship . Rare are the people who can come back after making the trip. Besides, this journey carries with it a difficult mission. Refuse now while you still can."

"No—I have already made a promise with Godou-san."

The one answering a step ahead of Liliana was Yuri, of course.

"—I promised I would find him before his return. I will accept this mission no matter what!"

Part 2

Kusanagi Godou was currently located in an empty space where darkness stretched infinitely.

Except for one light source. A white dot of light was shining like the brightest star, far in the distance, overhead.

Godou hugged his shoulders and began to wonder.

"I think I was in a similar place recently..."

Even when suddenly trapped in this kind of space, he was still able to remain calm.

As much as it was not his intention, this probably resulted from the experience he had accumulated as a Campione. Then there was his peer, the man not far away, currently looking around, this way and that.

"Hey Doni. We were just fighting the 'King of the End'... Right?"

"...of the End... Oh, you mean that sword god who suddenly popped up just now? Yeah, we were definitely trying to block that attack at the time. 'King of the End'... I think I've heard of this name."

Next to Godou, the blonde and handsome Salvatore Doni nodded.

In contrast to the desperate crisis earlier, Godou and Doni were completely unharmed, without even a single burn.

"I remember it's the god that Alec and that Greenwich princess were looking for, supposedly crazy strong. This is perfect. Once I meet him again somewhere, I'll just have a quick duel with him."

"As for me, I'd prefer to never meet him again, if possible..."

Unexpectedly informed of things, Doni had also heard of the ' King of End' rumors.

While expressing his contrary opinion, Godou also started to look for the third of his kindred. Since he was safe and sound, surely, she too—Indeed, she was here.

Madame Aisha was lying down a slight distance away.

"Are you okay, Aisha-san!?"

"Y-Yeah, well enough..."

Godou rushed over to call to her. The Madame made a gesture as though replying.

However, her consciousness still seemed quite confused. She turned her gaze to survey her surroundings.

"Surviving is more important than anything else..."

Staring at Madame Aisha who still could not speak with ease, Godou suddenly realized.

"This place is very similar to the 'corridor' that I passed through to reach the ancient world..."

"Ah, I see now. Now that you mention it, I find it familiar too."

Doni also nodded and agreed. If that were true, then the woman lying collapsed before them was their savior. Godou thanked her from the bottom of his heart.

"Aisha-san saved us, right? Thank you."

"N-Not at all. I simply combined my fortune's blessing with the corrective force maintaining ancient Gaul's history, thereby opening a fairy's corridor... That was how the three of us were saved."

"Come to think of it, your fairy's corridors tend to open automatically on their own."

"Uh... It is still ancient Gaul if we go out that exit over there. I intend to return after a while, but let's rest for now."

Madame Aisha pointed overhead while speaking.

A spot of white light was shining like a star at the place she indicated. Pondering something, Godou was reminded of what Ena said about the corridors simply being invisible.

If that description was correct—Godou tried asking:

"Does the exit leading to our twenty-first century still exist in this place? One that will take us back to our original time if we pass through...?"

"Hey hey, Godou. The battle is just about to start. Retreat is not an option."

"Like I'm gonna return on my own, leaving Erica and Seishuuin behind. I just want to confirm a possibility that just occurred to me."

"Kusanagi-san, that's very sharp of you. Honestly speaking, it does exist indeed. However—"

Under the two men's gaze, Madame Aisha clasped her hands together before her chest as though in prayer.

Then countless dots of light suddenly appeared in the surroundings. This scene was very similar to the innumerable stars scattered throughout the universe.

"Because every light here is a corridor exit, reaching the time period of your desire is quite difficult..."

"I-Is there any way to distinguish which exit connects to where?"

"High-ranking fairies from the Netherworld, used to time traveling, or guardian gods of travel are probably able to do it. But unfortunately, it's impossible by our efforts, Kusanagi-san and mine..."

"Looks like a shortcut is out of the question. I understand."

This was simply a whim of the moment. After Godou spoke cheerfully without any discouragement at all, the stars scattered througout the dark space disappeared overhead one after another.

On the other hand, careless words slipped out of the other man's mouth as his eyes flashed brightly.

"Hmm. In that case, choosing a random exit might be quite fun. Journeys to unknown destinations are just so exciting, aren't they?"

"Shut up with the nonsense, the guy who just said that the battle is about to start."

Giving Salvatore Doni a stern warning, Godou frowned.

This man could not be allowed to disrupt the past world any further. But currently, their first priority should be handling 'King of the End' Artos. At any rate, he was the Devil King-slaying war god and could very well indeed be the man who fought persistently until all Campiones were exterminated.

More important than anything else, there was that unforgettable warning... Godou sighed.

"Hey Salvatore Doni. I have an absolutely reluctant suggestion to make."

"What is it, my dear friend?"

"Temporarily putting aside my objections to your annoying statements, how about teaming up with me? Until the battle against that 'King of the End' Artos is over."

"Ehe."

Doni made one of those impressed smiles he rarely made, completely devoid of frivolity.

"Rather than rare, to be exact, this would be the very first time. I can't believe you're asking me to cooperate with you!"

"Please use a description with a little more tension in it, like a united front or an alliance, okay? Athena mentioned once before, that in a battle against the 'King of the End,' I will die for sure. All seven Campiones will be killed by that guy."

"Athena's warning, huh..."

"Besides, the other side still has that Artio goddess, albeit injured. Plus the unknown wind god. Even if the two of us cooperate, it's still two against three."

"Hoho, the odds are truly stacked against us."

"If you don't want to fight this battle where victory is uncertain, I'm not gonna force you."

"Are you kidding me? Fighting alongside my friend to confront a reckless battle, this is awesome stuff for furthering friendship. You and I, we're friends, right?"

"....."

"We're friends, right?"

"...I guess."

"Then it's fine, the alliance is established!"

In contrast to Doni who was suddenly smiling, Godou's face was covered by a bitter expression. But with this, the first of his preparations was complete. On the other hand, Madame Aisha spoke up in a fluster:

"E-Excuse me, Kusanagi-san. Then what should I be doing!?"

"Of course, it would be helpful if you could assist to make it three on three, Aisha-san... But is your condition okay? We're about to fight gods again."

It was readily apparent that Madame Aisha was greatly exhausted by the emergency evacuation just now.

Furthermore, she had openly declared a number of times that she was not suited to battle. That said, she apparently still held several secret techniques in reserve, such as 'reversing the healing authority' or the like, though it was still unclear whether they were usable in these circumstances—

As expected, the Madame bowed her head apologetically.

"I-I'm very sorry. Because the healing authority cannot be used on myself... I don't think I can recover immediately..."

"Don't worry about that. Remember, you just saved our lives."

Godou placed his hand on the Madame's shoulder and nodded at her.

"Just let Doni and me do our best. All you need to do is extend a helping hand if an opportunity arises for you to help."

"V-Very well."

Godou looked up to see the overhead light, shining brightly high above. Its position was slightly lower than earlier.

This was the exit that would lead Godou and the other two back to the ancient world. The exit was currently at a slightly lower height than before. Godou decided he had to finish the second of his preparations before the exit descended completely.

Just as he started to focus his concentration...

"Hey Godou. Of course, I respect Athena's warning that you brought up."

Salvatore Doni suddenly spoke up.

"But what do you think personally... No, what do you feel?"

"....."

Godou did not answer, for he was causing his entire body's magical power to burst out. There was no time left. The light overhead had already dropped to roughly the height of a small building. They were about to return to the hill where the mysterious hero had descended.

The second round was finally about to begin.

Part 3

"Those lights are the same as the ones fired off by Sir Lancelot's lance..."

"Probably the Divine Sword of Salvation..."

Murmuring away softly were Erica Blandelli and Seishuuin Ena .

The two of them were gazing in the direction where the three Campiones were facing earlier.

This was the hill where the pale-haired hero had descended, summoned by the goddess Artio's ritual. Earlier, during the instant when the divine sword's heavy blade was pointed at the heavens, a sphere of light had manifested in the sky like a sun, firing off an attack that pierced the ground—

Swallowed by this light, the godslayers had all vanished.

"Although they're not people who die so easily... But what if—"

"Ama no Murakumo's presence can't be felt either... But it shouldn't have disappeared from this land."

The hole piercing the ground measured roughly sixty meters in diameter. Even the [Boar] was defeated in one hit.

Even Erica was unable to stop herself from imagining gruesome outcomes. Without her usual cheerfulness, Ena spoke in dark tones .

But in the next instant, they discovered signs that things were " not as they seem." They stopped raising worries. Only now was the battle between gods and godslayers about to start officially.

Currently a *black sphere* had suddenly manifested high above the hill where the hero had descended.

This was the dark star for summoning a storm of gravity—Kusanagi Godou's newest weapon.

"Dawn's secret archives huh..."

This "black blade" was obtained through the guidance of the goddesses Athena and Circe.

Godou's preparations for using his new power had begun back when he was still inside the "fairy's corridor."

"Lend me the goddess' wisdom!"

This was the most powerful attack in Kusanagi Godou's arsenal.

However, raising it to maximum power required too much time . Using it to annihilate a group was relatively easy but sniping individual targets was much harder. Godou had come to understand these traits during his fight against Uldin.

—Hence, timing was the most important.

During the instant of returning to the ground from the corridor's alternate space...

At the same time, he sent the black star, having raised it to full power, towards the hill where the hero's faction waited!

"I'm relying on you, Ama no Murakumo!"

'Affirmative!'

Residing in his right arm, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi responded to Godou's command.

Two Campiones returned to the ground simultaneously. They found a crater behind them, sixty meters in diameter, so deep it seemed bottomless.

Before them was the hill where the pale-haired hero and the bear goddess were waiting.

Godou, Doni and Madame Aisha had returned to the hill. Furthermore, above the trio was a massive black star that was almost twice as large as the hole behind them.

'O steel that breaks a thousand blades, trample the enemy with a rampage of divine wind!'

The instant Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi issued the order, the dark star began to descend rapidly.

Its target was the hill where the gods stood, of course. At the same time, a rumbling storm began to blow violently.

This dark star was the manifestation of supergravity capable of sucking in everything on the ground. Soil, vegetation, the stone

circle on the hill, everything was being devoured by the black sphere together with the wind and the atmosphere.

Indeed, this was the gravitational storm of the "black blade."

"Hahaha! To think you'd obtain this kind of authority! As expected of Godou!"

"J-Just watching from afar, I never expected it to be so amazing!"

Doni was laughing with delight while Madame Aisha used her hands to hold down her overcoat, billowing in the wind.

The three Campiones were just short of being sucked in because , holding Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi up high, Godou did not give the black star permission to do so.

There were others who had escaped the gravitational attraction. Namely, the goddess Artio and the 'King of the End.'

"I call upon my avatar, the earth! The one turned into a mother!"

As a mother earth goddess, Artio chanted spell words.

The wound from Doni's sword was still carved on her abdomen as a red-black trail.

"By all means necessary, keep my son and I on the ground!"

Those without wings were not permitted to leave the earth.

Was this divine power invoked in adherence to this principle? Despite the pulls of the gravitational storm, Artio and the 'King of the End' remained firmly standing on the earth.

However, this type of resistance probably placed great strain on her. Artio's face was showing desperation.

Next, Godou's dark star rapidly descended on the fake duo of mother and son.

Probably at a speed of hundreds of kilometers per hour. However, just at this moment, the pale-haired hero swiftly drew the Divine Sword of Salvation, thrusting the platinum blade towards the rapidly approaching black sphere.

Immediately, a gigantic sphere of platinum light blocked the dark star head on!

"......!"

Still silent, the pale-haired hero injected a vast amount of magical power into the divine sword.

The Divine Sword of Salvation produced light that was as bright as the sun. The ball of light was just as large as the dark star controlled by Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

The white sun and black giant star proceeded to clash violently in midair.

For Godou, this was a scene he had not witnessed for a long time, ever since the battle against Lancelot. The white sun shot out hundreds of lightning flashes. A gravitational storm raged violently in the surroundings of the dark star.

Indeed, it was a clash between equals. This was exactly the same as that time with Lancelot—!

"...Well, that should be about right."

However, Godou still poured the majority of his magical power into Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi which he was raising up towards the sky. At the same time, he commented indifferently.

Godou muttered quietly then threw a glance at Doni behind him.

"Indeed, perhaps there are some slight differences."

"I knew it, your view does agree with mine. As expected of my dear friend."

"There must be something we still don't understand yet. That said, the other side's power is supposed to be much stronger than ours."

Godou spoke quietly while ignoring Doni's words of friendship.

"I think we can take advantage of this opening."

"Agreed. Then I'm on it!"

Giggling, Doni rushed out.

He ran from the foot of the hill towards the peak, unsheathing his longsword as he ascended.

Watching him from behind, Godou could not help but click his tongue in annoyance. Who could have expected he would be so in sync with Doni?

Clearly it was their first time being stuck in the same boat!

Completely unaware of Godou's frustrations, the godslayer of the sword raced effortlessly up the hill.

A slender figure blocked his path ahead. Wrapped in white cloth all over, the warrior was also wearing leather armor with a mask.

This red mask covered the face completely.

On the other hand, the positions corresponding to the eyes were painted black in color.

Due to the mask and the white cloth wrapped all over the body, none of the enemy's skin could be seen. The unidentified figure was wielding in one hand a massive sword that was almost his own height.

"Ehe. This means you won't let me advance further, right?"

"____"

With a toothy grin, Doni slashed downwards vertically with his longsword. The masked warrior blocked the attack calmly. With extreme speed, he had raised the giant sword to block the longsword.

However, in blocking Doni's longsword, the great blade was severed.

Indeed, Salvatore Doni's magic sword was an authority capable of slicing anything into two. Let alone the opponent's body, even armor, shields and weapons were easily sliced through.

The momentum of Doni's sword attack did not stop and sliced at the enemy's mask at lightning speed.

However, just three centimeters before cutting the enemy's face open, surprisingly, the masked warrior evaded the sword with minimal effort, rapidly jumping sideways at the same time.

This speed was like a gale's, whistling like the sound of blowing wind.

Then the masked warrior began to take further action. His movements resembled rapid punches. Currently, the black blade's gravitational storm was still blowing at ground level, but he was still able to ignore it with ease.

Every time he took a step with extreme speed, a whirlwind would result underfoot. He—or she—was probably a war god of gales, unaffected by the restraints of gravity.

"I guess you're the wind god from just now."

"____"

"I see you're trying to be a mute like your master. Hohoho, I don't really dislike this kind of preference."

The red-masked war god. A being that Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi exposed as a wind god and a sword.

A subordinate god of the "King of the End"? No. Godou shook his head. There was the example of Lancelot already. This god could very well have encountered the "King of the End" while wandering the earth and became allies. One could not jump to conclusions recklessly.

Meanwhile, confronted with the smiling Doni, the unidentified war god summoned a giant sword again.

"____!"

Holding a massive sword almost as long as he was tall, he charged Doni head on.

This speed was not simply gale speed. Rather, it was the speed of lightning. The same speed as Verethragna's incarnation of the [Raptor] or Alexandre Gascoigne's [Black Lightning]—divine speed!

Using divine speed, the masked war god kept making terrifying attacks.

All this time, he had been swinging his giant sword with one hand. Suddenly, it seemed as though he had increased to having twelve arms and twelve blades, attacking Doni's body from all directions.

As a result of divine speed, it looked like all twelve attacks were happening at the same time.

Nevertheless, Doni saw through all these attacks. Although it looked like twelve massive blades were slicing through the blond Campione, Doni's body simply flickered once like a mirage. Completely unharmed.

Salvatore Doni was a user of the mind's eye, capable of seeing through attacks even conducted with divine speed.

Finally, Doni made a rather casual forward thrust with his longsword, aiming to pierce the war god's mask.

It was a low-speed and leisurely thrust that did not seem like it belonged in a battle. Yet for some reason, the user of divine speed only barely managed to evade Doni's sword—No.

Seeing through Doni's swordsmanship was an exceedingly difficult task.

That was why the reaction was delayed. Just as the sword's blade was approaching right in front of his face, the war god barely managed to turn and evade successfully. This was Doni's divine skill that Godou had experienced before.

"____"

"You get it now, don't you? You're no match for me if you rely on speed alone."

The war god was probably making a terrible expression behind the mask. In contrast, Doni was flippant as usual and went as far as to say the following:

"Maybe your usual weapon is not a sword? Not to say something bad, but it doesn't matter even if you fought using your most skilled weapon."

In merely a brief exchange, he had already caught a glimpse of the enemy's martial arts.

After displaying what could be called the wise judgment of a martial genius, Doni laughed fearlessly.

"If you're only going to fight like this, I'm probably much stronger than you think."

"____"

The masked war god had apparently sealed off his best weapon on purpose.

Could it be that showing his appearance and weapon would be equivalent to exposing his true identity? Godou's curiosity spurred him to gaze intently at the war god.

But at the same time, he continued to hold Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi up high, pouring massive amounts of magical power into it.

Naturally, this was for maintaining the "black blade" and the gravitational storm. Overhead, the white sun of salvation was colliding with the dark star, resisting each other in a fight to annihilate the other.

Furthermore, the "King of the End" on the hill was doing the same as Godou—Or not, actually.

The pale-haired hero was running down the hill. Wielding the Divine Sword of Salvation, he slashed at Godou.

"Ack... He's not as strained as me!?"

In order to maintain the dark star, Godou was standing still, focusing his attention.

In contrast, the "King of the End" was running rapidly, finally arriving before Godou's eyes. Up above, the white star remained bright and dazzling. As expected, his latent ability was enough to surpass Godou's faction!

Then the Devil King-slaying hero swung his oft-used sword.

A diagonal slash, from shoulder to hip, was aimed at Devil King Kusanagi Godou.

Refined swordsmanship, fitting for a war god. Even though Godou's dynamic vision and concentration was able to see through a fastball traveling at a hundred miles per hour, he was still unable to evade a slash from the Divine Sword of Salvation.

Blood splattered everywhere. Rather than pain, Godou felt a scorching sensation spreading throughout his body.

A very severe injury. Nevertheless, as long as it was not fatal—even in failing to evade, Godou had still jumped backwards instantly using beast-like reflexes.

Moreover, a Campione's sturdy body, with bones harder than steel, displayed its true worth at times like these.

Still silent, the "King of the End" coldly faced off against the injured godslayer, readying his divine sword again.

With the sword's hilt raised up to shoulder height, this stance prepared an upper strike.

"Kusanagi-san! I shall heal your wound right now!"

"Don't come over! Aisha-san, you should retreat to a safe place—where Erica and Seishuuin are located!"

From behind came the worried voice of the one bearing miraculous hands of healing.

However, Godou commanded her in a gruff tone of voice. Frankly speaking, he had no confidence in blocking this formidable foe.

Presumably sensing Godou's intentions, Madame Aisha surprisingly gave an instant nod and departed rapidly. Quite amazing of her in such areas. A keen nose for survival.

Godou glared viciously at the "King of the End."

In response, the pale-haired hero remained utterly cold and expressionless—Completely unmoved.

This was the reason why Godou had not sensed any threat from this guy just now! Feeling the rising emotions of battle and the excitement produced from the search for victory, Godou began to curl his lips in a savage grin.

"All evildoers, tremble before my strength... Upon my mighty self, I shall bear the symbol of the raging camel!"

Godou invoked Verethragna's fourth incarnation, the [Camel], whose activation required severe injuries. Using this incarnation, Kusanagi Godou was able to obtain superhuman combat ability, kicking strength and resilience!

The [Camel]'s blessings also helped relieve the intense pain. Godou instantly shouted:

"Ama no Murakumo! Can I leave things on that side to you for now!?"

'Affirmative!'

Hearing this promise, delivered full of spirit, Godou stabbed the divine sword into the ground.

For brief periods of time, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's own magical power could probably sustain the "black blade." While throwing down his weapon, Godou also made his move.

With great speed, he slid towards the legs of the "King of the End."

Extending his heel along the way, Godou aimed a strike to shatter the hero's kneecaps. Even in the human world, there existed martial arts and combat skills that involved surprise attacks aimed at the enemy's legs while attacking from the ground. However, divine sword in hand, the hero simply took a slight step backwards, easily escaping the range of the kick.

Due to this being the smallest necessary backstep, he was able to switch to offense immediately without the slightest instant of delay.

Beneath the shining sword, Godou was still on the ground after his sliding attack failed.

The movements of ordinary combat skills would be unable to evade the Divine Sword of Salvation. In an unsightly manner, Godou rolled on the ground, escaping from under the shining divine sword.

Then immediately, he used the [Camel]'s leg strength to stand up.

At this moment, the opponent caught up. The 'King of the End' made a straight thrust with the divine sword's blade. Rather than a single strike, there were one, two, three... four thrusts.

In this brief instant, this divine technique aimed four thrusts at Godou's forehead, throat, heart and chest.

Godou kept turning and swaying his body from side to side, barely managing to evade the four thrusts. However, unlike the " King of the End," he did not switch to offense. After exhibiting divine skills, the enemy entered another stance for an upper strike, readying himself to engage any incoming attack.

Not a single movement was redundant. His body's central axis did not deviate.

Perhaps that was why he was able to attack and defend without delay, able to instantly switch to the next movement.

Even as a swordsman, the "King of the End" was quite outstanding.

As expected of the strongest war god. Very likely, even when faced against Salvatore Doni or Godou's sworn sister, Luo Cuilian, he would still be able to engage them effortlessly in a sword fight. Perhaps even winning through swordsmanship alone.

Furthermore, wielding the divine sword, his stance was majestic and imposing—

While wielding the sword neatly, even the smallest actions of the body and every step of the foot were polished to the extreme.

A "position" worthy of the hero wielding the sword of salvation. Literally a king's sword, slaying enemies while looking down upon them from above. Such was his combat form, fighting courageously, fair and square.

In contrast, Godou's beast-like movements could be described as the polar opposite indeed.

"Hey... Why are you unwilling to fight seriously?"

However, still unable to sense a threat from the "King of the End," Godou spoke up.

"You're the hero who intends to slaughter all the Campi—godslayers, right? Born under that star with this kind of fate, you can wield astounding power when trying to accomplish that mission. Isn't that right?"

"....."

"There was once a god called the Great Sage Equaling Heaven who imitated you, invoking the power for vanquishing Devil Kings. That time, he was much stronger than you are now. Why aren't you using your full power to eliminate us seriously?"

Indeed. That was the time when the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Sun Wukong, battled against three Campiones.

The monkey king of steel had prayed to the "sword god's star of destiny," summoning the power for exterminating Devil Kings, using it to suppress Kusanagi Godou, Luo Cuilian and John Pluto Smith.

Although the "King of the End" was strong indeed, he could not compare with the Great Sage Equaling Heaven of that time...

Godou shrugged after posing these honest questions.

The enemy remained silent. He looked like he had no intention of interacting with Godou.

But then...

"...If I were to ask in response, why do you hold such expectations for me?"

Godou finally heard it. He heard the voice from the "King of the End."

"Indeed, this body of mine shoulders the fate of exterminating the Devil Kings. It so happens that I manifested on this occasion due to a fake mother's entreaties. However, precisely because of that, you and I are having this encounter."

The voice was not only cool but also stern, yet incredibly, it carried a sweet feeling as well.

"Whether favorable or adverse fate, the incredible threads of destiny are weaved between individual humans as well as between humans and gods. Furthermore, between you and me—there should be few if any threads of fate linking us. On the level of crossing blades under such chance circumstances, such is the trivial bond of fate that we share..."

Godou stared at the "King of the End" once more.

Originally hiding his eyes behind shadows, those bangs had disappeared spontaneously. Was it because he started having the intention to communicate with Godou? In any case, his face was predictably handsome.

Like his voice, both his face and standing posture were cool and imposing.

High born. Aristocrat. A noble courtier. Only such descriptions could be applied to his appearance.

However, his handsome face was stained with battle-weary ferocity, neutralizing the sweetness of a handsome man's face. His facial beauty was filled with the nobility and stern dignity fitting for a great general on the battlefield.

Then this fierce aristocrat spoke with worry:

"I believe that great ritual of the ancient covenant must not be used lightly. It makes me hesitate whether I should wield this power against the few of you whose fates are lightly entwined with mine. Do you understand?"

"I think I have a rough idea..."

Godou also answered in a troubled voice.

For those who were named as war gods, the vast majority had excessive belligerence. However, the "King of the End" spoke differently compared to those other war gods—More importantly, Godou was able to converse with him smoothly against expectation. He also gave off an air of intellect. Rather, one could say that compared to the likes of Salvatore Doni, he seemed more like an ordinary person, right?

That said, as expected of a god, there were still many facets worth criticizing.

"But seeing how I'm already cut up so pitifully by you, I completely disagree with your assertion of a 'trivial bond of fate.'"

"Is that so? Now that you mention it, indeed you may be right."

Inflicting wounds that would surely kill a normal person on the spot, yet merely calling it "the level of crossing blades." That was ultimately unacceptable. Godou began to reprimand him using the human world's common sense.

Unbelievably, the "King of the End" nodded honestly.

"My mistake. Please forgive my ignorance... But wait, you godslayers are all immortal and larger-than-life characters no matter the time period. I would believe that a sword wound of this level does not really count as an injury for your kind."

The hero's apology was filled with honesty and sincerity.

"In fact, you are continuing to fight as though treating the wound as perfectly natural."

"Th-That's why, I say that it can't possibly not hurt."

"I see, I understand now. My thinking was too shallow indeed. As an apology, I shall reveal to you a secret that I did not mention just now."

The paled-hair aristocrat stared straight at Godou and said:

"The great ritual of the ancient covenant... Presently, I am still unable to use it."

"What did you say?"

"Not only that. As I am now, I have yet to reach the level when I can use other weapons freely with ease... I am still lacking what it takes to elevate myself as a sword god to become the strongest blade."

After this confession, the "King of the End" wielded the divine sword with both hands.

Still an upper strike. This posture exhibited proper and orthodox swordsmanship.

"If you are taking precautions against the great ritual of the covenant, there is no need. You are trying to find an opportunity for victory, aren't you? Any moment is as good as any other. Feel free to bring it on."

"...Why do you think that?"

"Because you godslayers are always like this. Whether being backed into a corner, reaching the climax of victory, carrying a conversation, whispering words of love, your kind never relaxes towards me—rather, you godslayers are always preparing to bite the enemy's neck at all times. That is what you are."

The "King of the End" continued to stare with such directness while delivering words of such sincerity.

Godou could not find words to object. The cool aristocrat had pointed out facts that were basically correct. After all, during the entire conversation, Godou had been searching for the right timing in a corner of his mind.

Even so, it was quite unbelievable to think he was successfully conversing with the hero who had exterminated so many Devil Kings.

Hence that was probably why. Surprised by this, Godou spoke up:

"You just said that fate does not bind us to you very strongly, right? In that case, can't you choose to stop fighting? You're only meeting that Artio goddess for the first time, right?"

"Unfortunately, I cannot do that."

At this moment, what surfaced on the "King of the End"'s face was weariness.

Perhaps he was already tired of endless battles, feeling utterly exhausted. However, against that weary expression, ferocity surfaced, as clear-cut as rust.

"I am the sword born to fight your kind. That is also my reason for being here this time. The only forbidden choice is that of halting this battle. My apologies."

The "King of the End" announced with his handsome face, weary yet fearless.

Godou was greatly stunned. He had seen this face somewhere in his dreams... This ridiculous notion surfaced in his mind.

"Even though my body is not in peak condition, fighting your kind is my destiny. I hope you will enjoy yourself briefly in a duel against me. That said, I am currently unsure if I can satisfy the likes of you godslayers in battle—"

"But avoidable battles should still be avoided..."

Godou sighed deeply.

By the time he noticed, the gravitational storm had already weakened.

In the white sun and dark star's clash in the air above, the dark star was already losing in the tide of battle. Weakening due to Godou having entrusted Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to maintain it, the dark star had shrunk to roughly half its size compared to when it was at peak power.

Turning his gaze, Godou saw the masked war god still engaged in a sword battle with Salvatore Doni.

No longer needing to put all her strength towards suppressing the gravitational storm, the goddess Artio was now looking downwards from the hill towards her "son"'s back. She was probably planning to assist.

Godou decided that now was his only chance to act. At this rate, they were going to be driven into an even worse predicament.

Agreeing with his victory instincts, Godou yelled:

"Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, you can stop Athena's sword now!"

"!?"

Because the dark star disappeared from the sky, the "King of the End" showed true surprise for the first time.

The only thing left in the air was a giant ball of light resembling a sun. However, that was fine. If victory could be seized within a minute or two, the rest did not matter.

Godou rushed full speed at the hero who was wielding the white divine sword.

Traces of surprise still lingered in the face of the war god, even as an outstanding swordsman. However, he still readied the divine sword for an upper attack and turned his sharp gaze towards Godou, fully prepared to intercept any attack.

Ten-odd steps more and Godou was probably going to enter the "King of the End"'s attack range of the divine sword—

Hence, Godou commanded simply:

"Divine Sword of Salvation... Let me have a go at using it too!"

"What!?"

Manifesting in Godou's right hand was Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Three feet three and a half inches in blade length. A strong sword with a gently curving blade of black. However, what should have been a jet-black blade was currently shining with platinum splendor. Kusanagi Godou's partner possessed the ability to replicate enemy authorities. Previously in the battle with Uldin, this had also been used to great effect.

Naturally, the target this time was the destructive power hidden in the Divine Sword of Salvation.

'The divine sword, stalwart in the face of barbarians, you are not the only one, hero!'

As Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi uttered these bold words, Godou swung it like a metal bat with both hands—

Throwing it towards the "King of the End."

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's blade was infused with the light and lightning of salvation.

Naturally, it was unable to produce a sun-like ball of light like the Divine Sword of Salvation. Nevertheless, it still possessed enough power to make the aristocrat sense slight danger.

Thrown through the air, the shining Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was blocked by the "King of the End" using the white divine sword.

The instant these two radiant swords clashed violently, lightning erupted from the point of contact.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi and the Divine Sword of Salvation bounced away from the lightning's impact. For just an instant, the "King of the End" went "!?" and stared wide-eyed, his attention slightly diverted.

Godou suddenly jumped and delivered a right straight kick from midair!

The kick dug straight into the "King of the End"'s chest. In that instant, Godou poured magical power into his right leg, increasing the kick's power to a maximum. This was his first attempt at doing so—But it worked.

The "King of the End" flew ten-odd meters, finally collapsing on his back somewhere halfway up the hill.

"How splendid, godslayer..."

Frowning in pain, the "King of the End" pushed his upper torso up, trying to stand.

The place where Godou's kick had dug in, right over the heart, was glowing with red light.

"Just now—It's my loss, huh. May I know your name?"

"...Kusanagi Godou."

"I shall remember it. For the day of our inevitable reunion."

Godou hesitated slightly due to his opponent's strange request, but still announced his name in the end. With a satisfied expression, the "King of the End" nodded at him. Then a few seconds passed.

Glowing above the heart, the red light suddenly increased in brightness—Exploding.

The light, carved into the opponent's body by Godou's kick, caused a vortex of flame, engulfing the "King of the End." Amidst the intensely burning flames of the explosion, the aristocrat's figure was gradually disappearing.

Shining brilliantly in the sky, the sun of salvation also vanished simultaneously with its master's exit from the stage.

"Does this count as my win...?"

And so, Godou was puzzled by this excessively simple conclusion.

Part 4

Salvatore Doni and the war god continued to slash at each other .

The masked war god attacked ferociously with swordsmanship of such divine speed that no shadows were produced. Doni evaded his opponent's rapid attacks using a sword savant's superb martial arts while turning his longsword to counterattack.

With movements of divine speed, the war god dodged Doni's sword by the slimmest of margins—

The battle repeated endlessly in this manner, a rather boring development.

This monotony was finally broken by the "King of the End"'s explosion.

Some distance away, the hero of the divine sword was engulfed by the flames of the explosion, disappearing...

Witnessing this shocking sight in a corner of his view, Doni chuckled to himself. As he had hoped, Kusanagi Godou had taken rather large strides in development as a warrior. Nothing else could please Doni as much as this.

On the other hand, the war god's attention was momentarily distracted by the master's defeat, thus exposing a slight opening.

In this very instant, Doni's body moved on its own.

Stepping forward as naturally as water flowing downhill, he swung the longsword horizontally with his right hand in a wide arc, intending to slice through the war god's neck.

An act performed by body and arm, faster than the mind could think—

The sword of mental nothingness. Swinging the sword naturally was where its true value lay.

Even the war god of gales was unable to evade this attack. Instead, he used his left forearm to block his neck, stopping Doni's sword. However, Doni's sword was the magic blade of severing.

It was supposed to be Doni's victory, with the war god's left arm and neck simultaneously severed.

Clang! The distinctive sound of steel clashing with each other rang out.

"Ehe... So you're the same as me."

"____"

The war god's upper arm was wrapped in layers of white cloth.

Hidden beneath the white cloth, the arm had the hardness and texture of steel. This was what had blocked Doni's sword.

The magic sword of severing sliced two-thirds deep into the war god's forearm, finally stopping. This was not a feat that any ordinary arm of steel could achieve. It was absolutely impossible unless the whole body could turn into indestructible steel.

Possessors of such an authority were quite limited. Sun Wukong the Great Sage Equaling Heaven, Siegfried the dragon-slaying hero, Salvatore Doni and others...

"A wind god possessing a body of steel? That's quite a difficult god to guess. Speaking of which, I've heard that Verethragna, whom Godou defeated, is also [Steel] with a wind god's divinity. Are you his relative or something?"

The war god of gales transformed into wind instead of answering.

Then turning into a gust of wind blowing past, he flew away from the hill.

It was as though he was saying that his time on stage had ended now that his master the hero had left. Doni shrugged and saw off his opponent.

Only Artio was left as the remaining enemy. Looking in her direction, Godou went "Eh?" and stared wide-eyed.

This was because the goddess, who had manifested out of the Celt's desire for vengeance, still had no intention of giving up on victory.

Slightly earlier, the two divine swords had been sent flying.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi had already returned to Godou's right arm. On the other hand, the Divine Sword of Salvation was picked up by the goddess Artio.

Seeing the body of that blade, Godou was taken aback. The divine sword was still shining with a platinum glow.

Neither decrepit nor rusted to any degree. Back when called the "remains of the King of the End," the Divine Sword of Salvation always looked utterly worn out.

"Sleeping Artos... No, the Devil King-exterminating warrior."

Artio called out to the divine sword of light.

"Offering you a part of my life was still far from bringing about a true awakening... In that case, it cannot be helped. The entirety of my wounded self shall be offered to you. Let this serve as the signal fire for a war's beginning."

Holding the divine sword's hilt in a reverse grip, the goddess pressed the blade's tip against her chest while murmuring softly.

Then as Godou watched, the glowing Divine Sword of Salvation was plunged into the goddess' chest.

Artio pierced her heart by her own hand. Flowing from the wound, the great amount of blood was all absorbed into the Divine Sword of Salvation.

"The key to making the strongest steel become the strongest—The life of a goddess! O sword of salvation, before your master awakens, assist me well!"

After calling out, Artio's body turned into sand and scattered in the wind.

Conversely, the Divine Sword of Salvation's light grew progressively stronger. After a while, the instant the goddess's body completely collapsed, the divine sword's blade fell straight down.

With that, the divine sword stabbed into the ground. Immediately after that...

A giant white sphere of light manifested in the air again. The light of salvation had revived.

"Just now's shining light revived again!?"

"I can't use the black sphere again! We have to think of a way to handle it!"

Doni had come running over, so Godou answered him.

Whether Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi or Godou himself, both were depleted in magical power. The "black blade" was already gone. During this time, the Divine Sword of Salvation started to attack.

Resembling a mini-sun high up in the air, the sphere of light released several hundred flashes of lightning.

Not just once. A great deal of lightning was shot again and again, released continuously, turning into a rain of lightning pouring onto the grond.

In order to avoid this lightning, Godou used the [Raptor] incarnation.

He activated divine speed capable of dodging even lightning. On the other hand, Doni's "body of steel" provided iron-clad defense all over and did not even flinch from direct attacks of lightning.

Godou recalled facing a similar situation in the battle against Lancelot...

Remembering that event, Godou realized something.

This lightning was different from that released by the war god of the lance. "Weapons" could be seen on the front tips of the descending lightning. Most numerous of all were arrows but all kinds of other objects could also be found.

Spears, glaives, axes, swords, pikes, iron rings, shields made of iron, steel clubs, iron plates, cannonballs—

Even objects that could not be described as weapons were included, such as blocks of iron or iron-worked models of skulls.

Their only similarity was that everything was made of iron. It was as though all the knights of a king's round table had gathered their favorite weapons and iron equipment together, a most chaotic situation.

Hiding in the lightning was a great number of arrows and other iron-crafted items—

When these objects collided violently with the ground or Doni's body, they disappeared simultaneously with the lightning's explosion.

"Am I seeing these things because they're traveling slower than the ones from last time...?"

Shocked, Godou muttered.

Using the [Raptor]'s divine speed, he kept weaving left and right to dodge the rain of lightning and iron.

Despite performing the same attack, this lightning was slower than Lancelot's. Godou could evade effortlessly. As a mother earth goddess, Artio was unable to use the divine sword as skillfully as a [War God of Steel] after all.

'At this rate, there will be no end to this... The main body must be dealt with somehow!'

While divine speed was activated, sounds from the external environment sounded as though they were coming from far away.

But this was definitely Doni's voice, no mistake about it. The blond Campione was currently running. Using his "body of steel" to deflect the lightning and weapons, he ran towards the Divine Sword of Salvation.

After a while, Doni finally came before the glowing divine sword.

Using his silver arm, he swung the magic sword. The slash produced a small crack on the Divine Sword of Salvation.

If he continued to chop repeatedly in this manner, was the blade of Devil King extermination going to be shattered? Just as Godou wondered, the Divine Sword of Salvation released a dazzling flash of light.

The light was accompanied by an extremely strong attack of superhigh heat.

Spreading in a hundred-eighty-degree arc, everything was incinerated within a dome-shaped region!

"!?"

Did the divine sword go berserk as a result of being attacked during an unstable state of control?

Godou trembled. At the same time, he ran with divine speed, trying to escape the heat blast's range as quickly as possible. Picking a random direction, he ran at full speed.

Naturally, at point-blank range, Doni was engulfed by the light.

There was no time to rescue him. Godou ran. The flash of hot light was chasing him from behind. Released from the Divine Sword of Salvation at the center, the flash of light and heat covered a dome exceeding four kilometers in radius.

Using the pace of divine speed, Godou could rush out of range in an instant.

However, running at full speed ended up causing his downfall instead.

Several hundred flashes of lightning were still pouring down nonstop from above. In the process of running, Godou was struck in the chest by one such flash of lightning. The lightning striking Godou had an iron arrowhead at its tip.

His entire body began to feel numb. Body warmth was rapidly lost.

Even so, he still continued to run for a while—But finally, he still had to stop.

Then he collapsed. His consciousness gradually grew hazy.

At this rate, death was not far away, he thought. However, lightning was still descending from high above, mixed with weapons of iron. Although most of the lightning did not fall in this area, it was not completely zero.

Then Godou saw a blue light approaching him.

Struck again, he would surely die—In the next instant, Godou lost consciousness.

Until not too long ago, there was a grassy hill standing upright on a wide open plain.

A stone circle was arranged on the hill where the goddess and the hero were waiting. Three Campiones had headed there to start an intense battle.

However, this entire area was now blown away.

A complete wasteland. Both vegetation and the hill had vanished, leaving an endless plain of dirt and sand. The only thing left behind was the giant hole dug out by the Divine Sword of Salvation.

This was because everything was blown away by the white explosion of light and heat.

Erica and Ena were now running across this area.

Their target was the zone roughly in the center of the explosion.

Along the way, they found Madame Aisha groaning with her gaze wandering about. She was only barely conscious but unharmed. According to her, she had withdrawn from the center of battle, which was why she did not get caught up in the light and explosion just now.

Her gaze was unsteady due to the "emergency evacuation" earlier.

"However, the two of them should be fighting over there. I hope they are safe and sound..."

Madame Aisha spoke dejectedly. However, she truly lived up to her name as a Campione.

A race capable of surviving even in the face of certain death. Erica and Ena were encouraged by her example. Asking the Madame to wait there for now, they continued to run towards the center of the blast.

Then finally arriving at a corner somewhere—

The Divine Sword of Salvation was stuck in the desolate ground , emitting dazzling brilliance.

Also, a familiar young man was lying face down nearby.

"Sir!"

"King Salvatore!"

The two girls ran over to the Campione of the sword.

For some reason, Salvatore Doni's entire body was gray in color. Whether his blond hair, his pale skin, the smile on his carefree face, even the clothes on his body were completely gray.

"What is going on...?"

"I suppose... This is probably a state of suspended animation."

Examining Doni's body together with the perplexed Ena, Erica nodded.

There was still a rather faint pulse. However, his breathing had already stopped. There was no response to touch or sound. This was not a state of normal life and activity.

Even so, Salvatore Doni was still alive. There were no external injuries on his body.

"Sir Salvatore has withstood the [White Stallion]'s attack in the past using a state of suspended animation. This time, he surely survived the explosion using the same method. However—"

From the hero Siegfried, he had usurped the "body of steel" authority.

A state of suspended animation was one of this authority's applications. But right now, Erica noticed one thing. Turned gray, Doni's body seemed softer than usual, a far cry from the hardness of steel.

"To think he would be sleeping here completely unguarded, even Sir Salvatore's life is truly hanging on a thread here. I suppose like Godou's [Ram], he needs to be taken care of properly by others after surviving."

"That's really lucky for him to be discovered by Ena and you."

Ena replied with a slightly wry smile.

Suffering the [White Stallion]'s attack in the past, Doni had spent a night underwater. As a result, with no one able to approach him, that was probably why the invulnerable Campione was able to stay safe.

Feeling impressed by Doni's good fortune, Erica tensed up her expression again.

"It is also possible that our Godou survived because his luck hasn't run out yet... I think the chances are quite high. Since it's him, he's probably killing time somewhere, right?"

"Hopefully, he'll come out faster—Erica-san, beware of danger!"

Suddenly issuing a warning, Ena jumped backwards. Erica followed suit.

Immediately, a flash of lightning flew towards the prone Salvatore Doni. Unbelievably, the Divine Sword of Salvation had released this attack.

Although Erica and Ena had dodged successfully, Doni's body was struck by the lightning.

"Sir Salvatore!?"

'Hohohoho. To think I would obtain a godslayer's body. Indeed, nothing could be better than that.'

It was the goddess Artio's voice.

The source of her voice was also the Divine Sword of Salvation—No, not exactly. At some point in time, a black mist had started hanging around the divine sword's surroundings. Shocked, Ena murmured:

"Having lost her body, only the soul lingers upon the earth..."

'For a mere mortal, seeing this much could be considered eyes of wisdom. How praiseworthy.'

The black mist spoke softly in Artio's voice again.

Struck by the lightning, Salvatore Doni's body suddenly jumped up. His entire body's grayness also recovered to its usual color.

Then with stiff movements, Doni extended his hand, reaching towards the Divine Sword of Salvation and the black mist.

Immediately, the Divine Sword of Salvation and the black mist both flew towards the Campione's hand.

'O godslayer of the sword, you shall do well to slumber on. I shall receive your body. In order to fill in for my son's absence, become the wielder of the divine sword!'

As Erica and Ena watched in shock, Doni gripped the Divine Sword of Salvation.

The black mist entered the Campione's body through his mouth . Then the tightly closed eyes of the blond young man suddenly opened wide and he slowly stood up.

"Hmm... Still unable to move smoothly at the present...?"

The goddess Artio's voice came from Doni's lips.

Handsome but usually quite frivolous, the blond Campione's face was making an expression acute beyond precedent. He now

looked like a handsome young man to the core, completely flawless.

Doni-Artio swung the Divine Sword of Salvation in a clumsy manner.

Quite sluggish. This was a far cry from the movements of the Devil King of swords who prided in his divine skills. Doni-Artio shook her head and muttered with dissatisfaction.

"Apparently, freedom of movement is still lacking for now. I must endure until I grow accustomed to this body... Fine, the road ahead is rather long."

Doni-Artio slowly trudged her way towards the forest in the distance.

"Two godslayers struck dead already, of which one of them is now in my grasp. However, so long as godslayers continue to roam the earth, divine retribution must be meted out to the inhabitants of the land..."

Leaving the speechless Erica and Ena behind, the goddess departed on her own, speaking at the same time:

"Farewell, maidservants serving the Devil King. Go tell the people that the hero of salvation shall soon descend to mete out divine retribution. Until that moment arrives, repent and regret repeatedly for all you want."

Watching the sight of Doni-Artio's back receding into the distance, Ena began to hesitate.

Was it really okay to let the goddess leave like this—?

Erica shook her head and silently warned her companion. The strong goddess did not care about humans the slightest. Reckless action could very well incur her wrath, endangering one's own life instead.

Hence, even in an abnormal state, a god's power still could not be opposed.

Silently seeing her off was the best course of action.

Even so—Erica looked up into the sky, lamenting silently.

Where had Kusanagi Godou disappeared to? Was he really slaughtered tragically, just as Doni-Artio had declared?

Chapter 5 - Traversing over a Thousand Years

Part 1

To this date, Kusanagi Godou had already survived death quite a number of times.

Using "this time as well" was a little inappropriate while "after so long since the previous time" was not quite right; nevertheless, Godou was—this time as well—in deep sleep and—after so long since the previous time—in a state of revival again.

This was the blessing conferred by Verethragna's eighth incarnation, the [Ram].

As much as it was not his intention, as a result of his strengthening power as a Campione, he had not used this incarnation of resurrection for the past few months. So long as he did not die instantly, he was able to revive from the abyss of death.

However, there still existed worrying aspects.

While the lightning of salvation was pouring down like a heavy rainstorm, he had to sleep continuously for several hours. Until the moment of revival, could he stay safe and sound?

Hence, as soon as he realized he was waking up in a cabin somewhere, Godou was greatly relieved.

Spurring his body that felt as heavy as lead, he barely managed to sit up.

"You have woken up, Kusanagi Godou?"

"Godou-san, you finally managed to recover."

Furthermore, inside this cabin, he even saw the two companions whom he missed greatly...

Godou was puzzled. Before losing consciousness, he was fighting in the land of ancient Gaul. (However, since that place was on the Rhine's east bank, according to the Roman Empire's territory, strictly speaking, it was part of Germania.) Nevertheless, standing before his eyes were Liliana Kranjcar and Mariya Yuri—

"Why are you two here?"

During what was supposed to be a touching reunion, Godou ended up speaking calmly.

Was this question really strange? Yuri and Liliana both smiled slightly wryly.

"Did I somehow return to the modern age without knowing?"

"No. It is currently spring during 406 CE, Kusanagi Godou. You are still in the part of Europe called Gaul and Germania at the time . In terms of modern geography, this place is in the outskirts of Bochum."

"We borrowed an uninhabited home."

Liliana quickly explained the situation while Yuri provided a supplementary comment with a smile.

Godou's current location had several beds covered by thick and heavy cloth.

The blanket covering him probably came from the two girls' consideration. This cabin was built using round timber in the style of a log house. Godou's bed was by the wall.

He looked out the window where no glass was installed.

There seemed to be many deciduous trees resembling oaks. It looked like quite a green area...

Seeing Godou perplexed, Liliana smiled at him.

"Actually, Princess Alice of Greenwich and His Highness of Los Angeles did everything they could to send us here."

"Alice-san and that man!?"

The two companions took turns in explaining their circumstances.

This included everything that had happened until they embarked on the journey across time. He was told that the old man encountered in the Netherworld had requested Yuri and Liliana to keep their eyes closed temporarily.

When they opened their eyes, they had already arrived near the battlefield where the "King of the End" had manifested.

When the Divine Sword of Salvation exploded with a flash, Liliana instantly used flight magic to fly together with Yuri, picking up the unconscious Godou along the way.

"So the blue I saw at the end was actually you two..."

"However, because I used flight magic without deciding on a place to land beforehand, the control was less than desirable. We ended up in the predicament of flying to this place without meeting up with Erica and Seishuuin Ena... I am very sorry."

As Liliana bowed her head, Yuri spoke up beside her.

"However, Liliana-san later scouted the area and discovered that this would be the western part of modern-day Germany."

"Don't feel bad about these kinds of things. It's thanks to you two that I'm still alive."

When using the witchcraft of flight, Liliana must first decide on a destination.

Flying directly without doing so would result in a runaway flight.

Godou nodded and explained roughly about his affairs. Then trying to stand up without thinking—He was taken by surprise. His body felt heavy to a scary degree. Even so, he tried his best to

steady his legs and managed to stand up. Nevertheless, he could only walk unsteadily.

Liliana instantly drew near to support Godou's swaying body. Frantically, Yuri also came to his side, opposite to the silver-haired knight, to support Godou as well.

"You had a tough time sitting up just now too... Despite using the [Ram], why is this happening?"

This would be considered quite an abnormal case given that the incarnation's effects were capable of healing severe injuries from the verge of death. Godou mustered his strength to stabilize his legs while standing, but clearly to little effect.

Hence, Liliana gazed intently at Godou and said:

"You said you were struck by the Divine Sword of Salvation, right? Kusanagi Godou, an arrow apparently wounded your chest. .. I saw it."

"Eh?"

Out of control back then, the Divine Sword of Salvation had caused a downpour of lightning where iron objects were mixed in.

Despite Godou not mentioning to Liliana about the arrow inside the lightning that had struck him, she still murmured indifferently:

"Divine Sword of Salvation... A weapon that gathers the weapons of numerous warriors. The symbol of the power of

salvation. Glory's last hope. Although just a sword, hidden within it are the characteristics of all weapons..."

Halfway through her speech, Godou realized it was an oracle from spirit vision.

However, he still felt that the Hime-Miko was supposed to be the one telling him this instead. After all, Mariya Yuri was the spirit vision user of the highest class.

Perhaps due to noticing Godou staring wide-eyed, Liliana turned her gaze away in embarrassment.

"Ever since visiting Plutarch's Residence three days ago, my spirit vision ability has improved unbelievably... I should say that it is much more sensitive than before."

"Yes, indeed. Liliana-san's sensing is definitely much sharper than before."

Happy for the growth undergone by her companion with the same powers of sight, Yuri spoke with elation.

"Stepping into that sanctuary has stimulated the senses of spirit vision, so it feels like our powers have strengthened to a new level. "

"Eh... That's really amazing. But you said three days?"

Despite feeling impressed, Godou was baffled at the same time.

"When using the [Ram] to revive, it used to take only half a day or so for me to wake up..."

"Well... This time, you slept for three days straight."

"I think you were unfortunate this time. The lightning that attacked you, Godou-san, was very likely the embodiment of a poison arrow, even capable of corroding the resilient vitality of Devil Kings..."

Liliana told Godou with a grave expression. Yuri followed with serious murmurs. This time, it looked like it was the Hime-Miko who received a spirit vision. She spoke an oracle and her eyes looked as though she were seeing into Godou's body.

"Even as the king of recovery, the ram's authority was unable to heal you completely. That is how powerful the acute poison was. I believe that you still require further treatment for now, Godou-san ..."

"I can't believe I happened to get shot by such a dangerous arrow. I surrender."

Muttering in this manner, Godou felt hopeful. With these two girls here, some of the puzzles he could not unravel may finally have a chance to be solved. This fact was confirmed once again.

After that, Godou went outside of the cabin.

As a test, he discovered that he was completely unable to walk.

In the end, Liliana and Yuri had to support him from the left and right sides respectively to accompany him outside.

Just as seen through the window, there were many trees around the cabin. Most commonly oaks, the numerous trees were flourishing.

"This was originally a logging cabin in the forest."

"It was Liliana-san who greeted people from a nearby village and asked them to lend it for our use."

"We can even prepare food. Let us visit the village to buy ingredients later."

"But what about money? If possible, let me pay for things."

Freeloading off nobles by a stroke of luck. Working as bodyguards or mercenaries. Illegal activities such as theft or robbery.

None of these seemed possible to connect to Liliana or Yuri. In response to Godou's offer to shoulder their finances, the serious girls shook their heads.

"There is no problem at the moment. Liliana-san has been able to earn money just by selling witch's herbs in the nearby village."

"I considered the fact that life in the ancient or medieval world should have needs for 'witches' and it turned out to be correct."

Unexpectedly, the girls had already built up a solid foundation for living.

Godou felt impressed. In terms of earning money, these two had done much better than the rest who had started living in the ancient world earlier.

Speaking of which, the two girls had also switched to wearing ancient attire.

Yuri was wearing a garment resembling a white one-piece dress whose lower hem reached down to her ankles, with a sash tied at her waist and a shawl of hemp on her shoulders. Feminine attire, apparently.

On the other hand, Liliana was wearing the type of tunic resembling a t-shirt that Godou had seen before, along with a what appeared to be a man's overcoat.

Furthermore, she had leather guards on her arms and a sheathed saber hanging at her waist. Judging from the design of the hilt, it was clearly the magic sword Il Maestro.

"On the other hand, the issue is... The three of you Campiones. Since we need to wait for the time when the Madame's 'corridor' opens, it is impossible to return to the modern era straight away."

"But we were asked to resolve the 'King of the End' problem before doing that."

The two girls explained respectively from Godou's sides.

Liliana was on the right while Yuri was on the left. Godou's body tensed up inexplicably.

"The 'King of the End' has disappeared for now, right..."

Godou lowered his voice to hide his discomfort.

However, the pale-haired aristocrat had said "for the day of our inevitable reunion." These words were impossible to ignore...

Yuri and Liliana leaned close to Godou—in other words, they pressed themselves tightly against him—while speaking.

"Unfortunately, the Netherworld's Venerable One talked about this. So long as the Divine Sword of Salvation remains in the goddess's hands, this commotion remains unquelled. In order to clean up this situation, the shining divine sword must be sealed away as decrepit remains... That was what he said."

"Defeating the goddess, huh. So either way, it needs to be accomplished."

"Umm... By the way, Godou-san, do you feel tired?"

"Yeah, I guess it's time for me to return inside."

"Also, you must eat things tonight to recover your energy."

"Yes. Then after that, you need to sleep earlier and rest properly . With the two of us taking care of you, your wounds should be able to recover a bit faster."

"...Uh, can I interrupt for a moment?"

Still supported by Liliana on the right and Yuri on the left, tightly pressed against his body, Godou interjected.

"I-I'm already okay, so I think it's better if you two kept slightly more distance..."

The two girls were acting as crutches to support Kusanagi Godou. This was very gratifying. On the other hand, it was quite normal for him to get a strange feeling from having two girls tightly pressed against him.

One was so slender that she seemed as though her body might break easily, yet rich with a feminine suppleness and undulating figure. The other girl looked relatively demure in comparison to Erica and Ena, but in actual fact, there was no doubt at all that her body had reached sufficient maturity.

These two girls possessed these types of bodies respectively.

Seeing Godou stammering, the girls seemed to realize where the issue lay in the current circumstances.

With a sudden shock, Yuri and Liliana both separated from Godou's body in a panic. Godou breathed a sigh of relief, intending to walk back by himself along the path they had taken.

But he ended up falling. Hence, the two girls instantly came over to support him, returning to the previous state.

"I-It's not necessary, didn't I say that just now?"

"Nonsense. No matter how you look at it, your condition definitely requires the help of others."

"Yes. So please do not try to act tough. Please rely on us without reservation."

Liliana seemed slightly resigned while Yuri appeared a little miffed as the two girls spoke respectively.

But in contrast to their tones of voice, they were carefully supporting Godou's heavy body on both sides, helping him to walk slowly. Godou felt embarrassed by the sensations of the two girls' bodies pressed tightly against him while feeling gratitude from the bottom of his heart.

That said, he also discovered another problem.

"In any case, starting tomorrow, there are many worrisome tasks that need to be handled."

"Yes. I still wish to hear from you, Godou-san, how you and the others have been living your life over on this side."

"Please recuperate patiently tonight before having a good chat with us about all the accumulated topics we wish to discuss."

"Uh... As much as I'd like to have a good chat with you two as well... I think it's better if we slept in separate locations at night, right? Alternatively, I'm fine with camping outdoors too. After coming to this side, I've grown quite used to it."

" "....." "

This time, Godou tried his best to plead in an appropriate manner with the two girls who had shown their care to him through their words.

Yuri and Liliana responded to Godou with a gaze that looked like they had something to say.

"Th-That cabin is quite cramped, right!? Also, with two girls living in the same home to take care of a boy, it feels quite inappropriate in many ways—!"

"Godou-san, what do you mean by this? I believe that such opinions are rather late in hindsight."

"Also, after hearing your rough explanation earlier, there are a number of things I am curious about. During the half-month period in ancient Gaul, you were living harmoniously with Erica and Seishuuin Ena under the same roof—That is the impression that I gathered. Of course, this is merely my own casual imagination."

"Oh right. Actually, I share the same feeling too, Liliana-san!"

"You too, I see... Speaking of which, during your battle in the ancient world earlier, I remember Kusanagi Godou definitely using the [Sword]'s spell words at the time."

"As one would expect, Godou-san must have performed that ritual with someone..."

"I too, am quite curious about the identity of the partner in the ritual... Looks like there are many issues that must be pursued tonight after all."

"Yes. So Godou-san, please accompany us obediently in a casual conversation."

Godou was supported by the two girls, one on each side.

Every time in the past, he would receive their assistance and guidance. However, due to the words "taken away" surfacing in his mind for a fact, Godou rather cautiously avoided objecting.

Part 2

And so, Godou and the two girls spent a night together.

The girls pursued salacious matters rather relentlessly, demanding supplementary explanations whenever they deemed anything insufficiently clear. In the end, Godou had no choice but to beg them for forgiveness with a sigh. The situation was quite frantic.

However, the two girls also took care of Godou's health with the same level of zeal as they had pursued certain matters.

Consequently, Godou slipped into the realm of dreams with feelings of gratitude towards Yuri and Liliana's generosity. As for the ritual occurring just before the battle against Uldin, the fact that it was actually the three of them together... Godou was quite relieved that he had successfully guarded this secret.

Then night passed and the next morning arrived.

"I will go scout the place where the 'King of the End' manifested as well as check out the situation at Cologne... or rather, Colonia Agrippina. In any case, I intend to return before dark."

During the morning, Liliana set off on her own.

As an oriental, Yuri drew resentful stares from people due to her resemblance to the Huns. On the other hand, Godou's condition was still far from ideal. Hence, it was probably more convenient for Liliana to act alone. Capable of using flight magic, she could travel back and forth from distant places much faster than horses.

Hence, even when noon had passed, Godou was not particularly worried for her and still continued to rest in bed at the cabin. Instead, what he worried about was—

"How are things on those girls' side...?"

Godou stared at his right arm while muttering.

His "partner" Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi resided in this arm. However, it was currently in a dormant state, most likely affected by Godou's ill state of health. Under these conditions, the divine sword was unable to communicate with Ena.

Erica, Ena, Doni, Madame Aisha, as well as the hero and the goddess, what exactly happened to them?

No idea at all. Godou felt anxious on the bed. But rather than sleeping with his head under the covers, he sat up cross-legged.

"Unacceptable, Godou-san. If you do not lie down, it will affect your body's recovery."

"Staying in bed doesn't suit my personality, Mariya."

"Seriously... Unlike previous times, Godou-san, your rate of healing is relatively slow. You must be more careful."

Yuri reprimanded him for lacking self-awareness of his wounded state. Then the kindhearted Yamato Nadeshiko suddenly smiled and said the following:

"Whether Liliana-san or I, neither of us has received inauspicious revelations so far... Consequently, I believe that everyone should be fine."

"That's true too... I don't really think Erica or Seishuuin will fight uncertain battles whereas the other two aren't gonna get killed that easily."

Responding to her kindness of intentionally putting forth an optimistic viewpoint to ease his mind, Godou relaxed his shoulders and lay down.

However, he never expected to be spending time alone with Yuri in a cramped wooden cabin.

Godou recalled the few days he had spent together with Yuri in a cottage on a remote island, feeling a little embarrassed. Speaking

of which, the grain porridge he had eaten for lunch was Yuri's cooking, naturally. Even this aspect was the same as that time living together on the island. Furthermore, as soon as he realized this, Godou was able to relax for real.

"Rather than staying cooped up in bed all day, I think getting a bit of physical activity would be better. Going outside for a bit should be okay, right?"

"Here you go making this sort of reckless suggestion again..."

Godou made his request to Yuri and waited for her serious answer.

"Your wounds have not recovered. I will be very troubled if you do not rest properly."

"Well, because I'm seldom sick in bed, I don't really know how to rest. Rather, wouldn't it better for my health if I went for a brief walk?"

"Seriously... You leave me no choice, Godou-san."

Sighing, Yuri nodded as though she were agreeing to the demands of a spoilt child.

"However, please allow me to accompany you. Are you really not going to go far?"

"Eh?"

Thus, Godou was able to go out together with Yuri.

Supported by the graceful Yamato Nadeshiko like the previous day, he stumbled around, using an oak branch he had just picked up to use as a crutch. Although he still felt embarrassed about leaning so tightly against Yuri, Godou could not go back since he was the one who requested the walk in the first place.

Yuri brought the slightly blushing Godou to a nearby stream.

The wooden cabin was located in a forest halfway up a low-altitude mountain. As one would expect, the stream flowing through this place was clean with transparent and pristine water.

"Thank goodness there is a water source so close by. It is impossible to cook and do laundry without water."

"I see... This kind of mountain isn't going to have aqueducts or public baths, I guess."

Godou concurred with Yuri's comment, resonating deeply within.

Naturally, ordinary villages and towns definitely did not have those types of facilities. This proved how extraordinary Roman colonial cities were in ancient times as civilized zones.

Did Yuri and Liliana use this stream's flowing water to take their baths?

Triggered by this speculation, Godou instantly recalled the sight of these maidens' tender skin he had witnessed before. However, he mustered resolute willpower to bury these memories in darkness. Instead, he said:

"Because of me, you girls had to come to this kind of place—"

"Godou-san, there is no need to say such words."

"Really?"

"Yes, indeed."

A conversation with Yuri leaning by his side. A brief exchange of words.

Even so, there was an unbelievable sense of connected minds and hearts. Yuri was probably feeling the same. After their gazes met up, she displayed a gentle smile.

"Oh, by the way, this was brought up yesterday as well. Godou-san, you said you felt uncomfortable about sleeping in the same place as us. I believe it is time that you gave up on such an obstinate view."

"R-Really?"

"Yes, it really is quite overdue in hindsight. Especially since you and I, Godou-san... We have previously lived together for a number of days already."

Yuri was apparently recalling their earlier trip to Malaysia.

This time, silence descended between them, yet it did not feel awkward. Rather, they felt even more connected than before. After a brief while, Yuri slowly spoke up:

"After that, it was quite a predicament. The others questioned so intensely..."

"But clearly we didn't do anything weird..."

"O-Of course, in order to prepare for combat against the goddess, the two of us undertook the ritual, but it was undoubtedly necessary... Also, it is an act we are already accustomed to..."

"Y-Yeah."

"Ultimately, it was simply because you and I were alone together, Godou-san, do you agree...?"

"Probably... The way they pursued the matter so far, it made me feel like we simply should have done something for real, might as well, right?"

Godou was suddenly shocked by the muttering grumbles that slipped out of his mouth. Carried away by the sweet mood, he had apparently said something unnecessary. If Liliana were present as well, he could not possibly have been so careless.

Furthermore, Yuri was bowing her head shyly. At the same time, she tugged lightly at Godou's sleeve, whispering softly:

"C-Currently, we are alone together as well—It just so happens that we are alone together."

"Yeah."

"A-Also, there is nothing especially urgent..."

"If we get suspected afterwards..."

Since they were leaning tightly together to begin with, all it took Godou was a slight turn of his shoulder to effortlessly embrace Yuri in his arms.

Spontaneously, Godou found himself gazing into Yuri's shy face. As though responding to him, Yuri looked up in turn, slowly bringing her lips near.

Then as long as Godou drew his lips near as well—Just at this very moment...

"Kusanagi Godou! Mariya Yuri! Liliana Kranjcar has returned! Where have the two of you gone!?"

Hearing Liliana's stern voice, Godou and Yuri could not help but exchange a glance.

"This does happen sometimes."

"We'd better return quickly to Liliana's side."

While feeling the relief from being liberated from a sense of guilt, they smiled wryly.

Then the two of them went back to the cabin.

Not long after Liliana had returned during late afternoon...

The sun was currently setting. The western sky was dyed red and dusk had arrived. Under the setting sun, Godou was facing the knight who had returned from scouting.

This mountain cabin was north by northeast of Colonia Agrippina.

The Rhine lay twenty-something kilometers to the west. In other words, they were inside the territory of Germania. Over here , there were no roads like those paved on the Rhine's shores. Unlike modern times, neither trains nor cars existed.

Making a round trip within half a day was only possible through Liliana's powers.

"I first used the [Witch's Eye] to fly my vision over to the area of Colonia Agrippina. After scouting the situation nearby, I flew over there personally and learned of many news."

Liliana was reporting outside the cabin.

While listening to her, Godou was still recuperating, sitting on a tree stump. In addition, Yuri was inside the cabin, preparing dinner.

Using ancient hearths to cook should be quite inconvenient, but Yuri did not find the task especially grueling.

Godou heard that during her Hime-Miko training, she had to live self-sufficiently in a hut in the mountains with neither natural gas nor running water, spending her days isolated from worldly life. She had apparently mastered how to use hearths and other such things during that time.

"As expected, being able to fly is so convenient."

Having been taken "flying" before by Liliana, Godou muttered wholeheartedly. Although he was already used to lacking the convenience of cars and phones, having such inventions of civilization at hand would be best after all.

"Then how's the situation over there?"

"Slightly complicated. I shall save the details for later when we are having dinner with Mariya Yuri together. However, there should be quite a fair amount of time before dinner is ready. During this time, let us perform a diagnosis."

"Diagnosis?"

"Yes. Please allow me to have a look at the wound where the Divine Sword of Salvation had struck."

Liliana pointed at the chest of the puzzled Godou.

"Campione bodies are tough and resilient beyond imagination. However, this is the first time I am seeing your wound recovery rate so unbelievably slow. Just in case, it needs to be checked. Could you take off your clothing?"

"Eh?"

"This is only logical in order to examine the wound, right?"

Agreeing that she made sense, Godou nodded and took off his shirt.

A naked upper torso, almost completely devoid of fat, the kind of physique that was very muscular despite looking slender on first glance. This was probably thanks to overusing his body constantly on a regular basis. Clearly, the day of getting diagnosed with metabolic syndrome in a health checkup was far away.

The body's exterior could be considered unharmed. The lightning had probably injured somewhere deep in the body.

Since Godou happened to be sitting on a tree stump, he felt like he was at a hospital.

Acting as the doctor, Liliana began to blush for some reason, shifting her gaze away from Godou's body—

"What's the matter? You're not gonna diagnose my wound?"

"Oh no. I am very sorry. Looking at it again from such a close distance, I suddenly feel very embarrassed... Also, all sorts of nonsensical ideas are occurring to me..."

"But clearly you were there when we were swimming at a beach last time. What a weird girl you are."

Godou laughed lightly. Given the serious personality she had clearly exhibited all along was clearly fine, it was quite suspicious for Liliana to suddenly act strangely. There were times when this literary girl, highly adept at writing poetry and novels, acted in ways that exceeded the comprehension of an athletically inclined boy like Godou.

Meanwhile, still unable to look Godou in the face, Liliana cautiously extended her hand, moving her pale fingers over his chest.

Then the witch, who was serving as a substitute doctor in the ancient world, narrowed her eyes.

"I knew it... The wound has showed no signs of recovery at all since yesterday."

"Eh!?"

"Judging from this situation, one cannot expect it to heal naturally at ridiculous speeds like before. You will need to recuperate like this for one or two months' time. Either that or undergo magical treatment..."

"But there's no time to rest slowly right now."

"In that case, treatment is necessary. Understood. I will immediately change the method of treatment."

"...Eh?"

"You are the one who said there is no time, Kusanagi Godou."

"Th-That's true but.."

As Liliana pressed near, having recovered a serious expression, Godou began to panic.

Undergoing magical treatment. Apart from the usual manner, there was no other choice. Oh well, since this happened every time , backing down now at this juncture might be rather ludicrous.

However, Godou still faltered.

Recalling the conversation with Yuri during the day, he felt like needles were pricking his heart.

"I-I don't think treatment needs to start straight away today. Waiting until tomorrow should also be..."

"Something that can be finished today should not be saved for tomorrow. I believe that you need to be treated as soon as possible. "

After objecting rationally, Liliana lowered her gaze with a lack of confidence.

"O-Or rather... You would like someone other than me to treat you? I-If that is the case, it cannot be helped. As your knight, I must respect the lord's wishes—"

"What rubbish are you talking about? It's fine for you to do it, Liliana."

Halfway through, Godou interrupted the silver-haired knight's depressed suggestion.

Godou felt that he could never face Liliana again if he had allowed her to finish. That was what her words made him think. Furthermore, he immediately realized his own stupidity.

By the time he noticed, Liliana was already gazing straight at him.

Instead of the stern and knightly gaze she usually displayed, these eyes looked as though they belonged to accomplices who knew each other's lies.

"Since... that is your true wish, then as your knight, I..."

"Y-Yeah."

"We are king and knight respectively. For the sake of battle that will inevitably arrive one day, we must do everything to prepare."

"That's probably true, I guess..."

"Seeing as it is for this purpose, I believe that I must properly do what is within my ability..."

Up until just now, Liliana was speaking while she stood.

However, she had suddenly sat down now, sitting on Godou's lap.

Clearly not a position that matched the relationship between king and knight, this would be more aptly compared to the boldness of intimacy between lovers on a park bench. However, the two of them gazed into each other's eyes like that.

As the silver-haired knight slowly closed her eyes, all hesitation vanished from Godou's heart completely.

"Liliana...!"

"Yes...!"

While she sat on his lap, Godou embraced her, kissing her lips passionately.

Liliana opened her mouth in response, then Godou instantly inserted his tongue inside. Thoroughly savoring the taste of her lips, his tongue entangled with her tongue. Godou slowly began to lose control of himself.

Moving his kiss from her lips to her neck, he sucked forcefully before licking her neck, his tongue wandering over its surface.

"M-Mmm, mmmmmmm!"

Liliana suddenly shrank back. In fact, it was only recently when Godou discovered that she was very vulnerable to stimulation at this spot. The loyal female knight endured tearfully while pleading to Godou:

"S-Save this for later... Let me apply the spell first..."

Right. Godou was reminded again of why they were doing this.

He kissed Liliana's lips again. Next, the fairy-like girl of Eastern European descent displayed eyes of ecstasy while whispering as though in puzzlement. However, she did not move her lips away.

"N-No good. The healing spell is not working..."

"I see... The Divine Sword of Salvation is the weapon for exterminating Devil Kings. So the poison can't be cleansed so easily because I am poisoned inside by that thing...?"

After sharing a few light kisses with Liliana repeatedly, Godou nodded.

Upon further thought, it was quite likely indeed. On the other hand, the silver-haired girl, both witch and knight, panted heavily while speaking stalwartly:

"N-No matter what, I will find a way. Because it is for you..."

"Counting on you."

Answering briefly, Godou once again sucked Liliana's lips forcefully. In return, Liliana responded by inserting her tongue into Godou's mouth.

Just as their behavior was gradually escalating, a noise was heard. The cabin's wooden door opened suddenly.

"Everyone, dinner is already prepared. Where have you gone?"

Opening the cabin's door, Yuri called to them.

Luckily, Godou and Liliana's position was at a dead angle out of view from the door's location. Still remaining in the same posture held in Godou's embrace, Liliana stopped kissing then yelled back in a resolute voice.

"Coming! Just wait a minute!"

"Very well, I shall wait for you both."

Clack. The sound of the door being shut. Yuri had gone back inside the cabin.

Phew. Sitting on Godou's lap, Liliana breathed a sigh of relief.

Although it looked like she had carried out the deception calmly, she was actually completely petrified inside. Then after looking up suddenly, she kissed Godou again.

Smooch—Sucking forcefully at Godou's lips, she entangled their tongues together, reluctant to end things.

"It is almost time for us to head back. Otherwise, Mariya Yuri might find it suspicious..."

Finally separating their lips, Liliana added a light kiss at the very end.

After doing all this, only then did Liliana urge their return while smiling mischievously.

Part 3

Dinner that night consisted of cheese, hard bread and soup made from beans, vegetables and mushrooms.

Bought by Liliana from a nearby village, venison served to add some variety to the simple menu.

Everyone gathered around a wooden table to eat this meal.

Despite feeling grateful to Yuri for making all this food, Godou had a great weight on his heart due to the behavior he had engaged with Liliana just now. But clearly he was just one step shy of doing similar things with Yuri during the daytime—

"In the end, you had to prepare dinner on your own unaided. Many apologies."

"Do not worry about that. Liliana-san, you are the one who must be tired, flying to so many places on your own. Please have a good rest tonight."

Unaware of Godou's guilty conscience, Yuri and Liliana chatted amiably.

They both shared the trait of being domestically inclined girls to begin with. Presumably getting used to each other's pace, they often spent time together from day to day. Tonight, the atmosphere was also harmonious as usual.

Nevertheless, their amicable relationship was causing Godou some minor stress.

Although I've come to realize somewhat already, am I really such a bastard...? These thoughts of self-reprimand gradually began to surface.

"Then here are the results of my reconnaissance."

Hearing Liliana start to report, Godou frantically sat up straight .

"I was unable to find out the whereabouts of the goddess and the 'King of the End.' However, I did witness a small conflict occurring near Colonia Agrippina."

"A small conflict?"

"Yes. One side appeared to be Frankish warriors while the other consisted of giant bears controlled by some kind of magic. The giant bear army seemed to have crossed over from the Rhine's east bank—Germania."

"Artio is still alive huh..."

"Also, due to Sir Salvatore having gone missing, Colonia Agrippina's interior has become quite chaotic. After all, they have currently lost their leader."

"That idiot!?"

"Also, there is the place you asked me to visit. Kusanagi Godou, I have checked out your residence too, but Erica and Seishuuin Ena were not present. The house only contained servants."

"Even those two as well..."

Godou sighed but immediately continued:

"Just as I thought, I'd better get back as soon as possible. All of us, let's travel over there tomorrow."

This was his decision as the leader. Yuri and Liliana nodded in agreement.

Then dinner finished and after clearing things up, the trio went to bed early.

The simple cabin did not provide any separation of space. The three of them had moved the table aside and laid out three blankets on the floor. Then with the trio lying down side by side, a simple bed was made.

Then after saying she was washing her face before sleeping, Liliana went outside.

"Excuse me, Godou-san... May I have a moment of your time?"

Yuri came over to the center of the bedding where Godou was sitting cross-legged.

"What's up, Mariya?"

"Yes, I have been feeling this all day. The poison arrow wound inflicted by the Divine Sword of Salvation seems to be healing very slowly."

Godou jumped in surprise. Could it be that—

"Another journey, most likely dangerous, will be commencing tomorrow. Hence, your injuries need to be cured as soon as possible. Let us, together..."

"I-Indeed, you're right."

"Yes. I had a feeling that Godou would agree."

Sitting on the bedding with Godou, Yuri was in formal seiza posture as though it were perfectly natural.

Furthermore, the pure Yamato Nadeshiko was bowing her head from shyness. Closing her eyes quietly, she whispered softly with her cherry lips.

"I-If we do not hurry, Liliana-san will be back soon."

Choosing to wait for Godou to make the first move, this behavior was very much in Yuri's conservative style.

Impelled by this cuteness of hers, Godou went "Mariya...!" and drew his face near, passionately taking her soft lips.

"Ah... Godou-san—Let the treatment now..."

The Hime-Miko accepted Godou's slightly violent kiss while whispering quietly.

Godou could feel her exhaled breath, saliva and magical power passing through her lips, transmitted over to him. Probably because it was the second time today, he was able to pinpoint the spell's movements much more accurately than earlier.

Through Godou's throat, Yuri's spell definitely reached every location inside his body.

But there was no change at all. Rather, strictly speaking, the instant he received the healing spell, Godou felt his internal temperature rise slightly, but that was all.

It felt like pouring a cup of water onto a dry desert, only producing an instant of relief.

"What... is going on here?"

Yuri's lips parted from him and she whispered while staring at Godou's chest.

Clearly she had just used spirit vision to see the situation inside Godou's body. Gently, she caressed Godou's chest then said:

"I shall try to think of other methods. Sorry for failing to help."

"D-Don't say that. I'm the one who's ashamed. Clearly, you've gone to such lengths for me already."

"I do not mind at all. Because this is for your sake."

Smiling gracefully, Yuri bowed her head and returned to her bed.

The timing was just right. Liliana returned instantly right after this. Furthermore, she was unaware that Godou's heart was pounding violently inside.

"Sorry for making you wait. Then let us rest."

The silver-haired knight put out the light.

Olive oil had been poured into a dish and lit to serve as lightning.

But due to the moonlight streaming through the window, it was not completely dark.

As the only man present, Godou slept in the middle with Yuri on the left and Liliana on the right.

But due to what he was doing with Yuri just now, Godou's heart was still racing and he was unable to fall asleep.

After a while, Yuri's breathing noises from peaceful sleep could be heard.

I must sleep earlier—Just as Godou shut his eyes tightly...

(Kusanagi Godou, are you still awake...?)

Godou heard whispers from beside him. Liliana was lying in bed with her body turned towards him. Without sitting up, she had simply spun her upper torso to face Godou.

Afraid of waking Yuri, Godou answered in quiet whispers too.

(Yeah. What's up?)

(Actually, something bothered me when I was giving you treatment.)

(S-Sure.)

(I intend to confirm it. Could I take a moment of your time?)

(!?)

Despite asking for consent, Liliana immediately came over to Godou without waiting for his reply.

Still in a lying down posture, she shifted her body over, ending up lying on the same bedding as Godou's. Face to face, they were close enough to feel each other's breath.

This was the kind of situation where one could not deny accusations of sleeping together.

(This type of behavior... makes me quite nervous.)

Knowing quite well how questionable her actions were, the silvered-haired girl whispered.

However, Liliana quietly brought her face near Godou, bravely performing a lying-down kiss, in spite of Yuri sleeping no further than two meters away.

Staying still, Godou and Liliana continued kissing in this manner.

The kiss was not especially intense in movement. On the other hand, their tongues and lips were overlapping and entangling one another repeatedly.

Smooch, smooch, the sounds of kissing echoed within the quiet cabin. Enjoying this fully intimate kiss that did not include intense actions, the two of them still did not separate their lips from each other.

(After healing magic is delivered into your body, it definitely activates for only an instant... Looks like it is necessary to ponder the reasons why.)

(I-I see.)

Hearing Liliana's whispers, Godou nodded at her.

In actual fact, he had already gathered the same impression from Yuri's treatment before going to bed. Unaware of that, the silver-haired girl smiled reassuringly at Godou before returning to her bed.

Finally, I can sleep for real—

Listening to Liliana's quiet breathing noises in her sleep, Godou slowly shut his eyes again.

Erica Blandelli and Seishuuin Ena.

These two girls had already established a "ceasefire agreement" before starting their life of cohabitation. Precisely because they regarded each other as rivals in both business and pleasure, that was why they had decided to avoid wasting time and energy on escalating competitive behavior.

However, this sort of competitiveness did not exist between Yuri and Liliana.

The atmosphere was calm and harmonious when the three of them spent time together, Godou included.

Not arguing over which girl was staying by Godou's side, they respected each other and provided mutual assistance. Indeed, it was a reassuring relationship.

But perhaps because of this, it would not occur to them to establish an agreement between ladies, right?

Also, when faced with that type of ritual, Godou himself did not seem as resistant as before...

Moreover, Godou was not currently in that cabin while pondering over these matters.

This morning, after setting off using Liliana's flight magic, two hours had passed already. Flying south from the cabin for nearly sixty kilometers, they arrived at a vast plain in Germania.

Apart from a few scattered forests, this was a completely flat area of grassland.

The current location was also quite near Colonia Agrippina apparently. Acting as the guide, Lilana had already kept her eyes shut for half an hour or so.

Using her prided [Witch's Eye] witchcraft to send her vision far away, she was currently scouting for signs of unrest.

"Thank goodness we have Liliana-san in times like these."

"Yeah."

Godou responded by nodding vigorously at Yuri who was praising with a smile.

Having Liliana present with her talent in witchcraft meant that efficiency was vastly improved for movement and reconnaissance. Last time when they were wandering the goddess's island in the South Seas, life would have been much easier if they had her abilities to help them.

"I have discovered something a little... No, greatly troublesome."

Liliana slowly opened her eyes and reported.

"It is not too far from here. I intend to head over for a look."

"Got it, I'm counting on you."

Obtaining Godou's consent, the silver-haired witch used flight magic.

The blue light of flight magic enveloped the trio as they flew towards the sky. After less than thirty minutes of flying time, they landed at a small hill of rock, a couple dozen meters in height.

Since they had not crossed the Rhine yet, this place was still within Germania.

Wide open plains lay in all directions. Since they had landed on a high platform near the peak of the rocky hill, the "troublesome" thing mentioned by Liliana was immediately visible.

On a vast plain down below, nearly fifty bears were gathered. Every one of them was a giant bear, roughly four or five meters in body length. Those giant bodies looked like houses at first glance.

These were the goddess Artio's minions that Godou and the Franks had fought before. Furthermore, this group of giant bears had formed a circle, surrounding and staring at a single human.

Also, the one standing in the circle's center was—

"S-Sir Salvatore!?"

Feeling shocked, Yuri whispered softly.

Indeed, the person surrounded by the giant bears was Salvatore Doni.

However, Doni's current face was filled with imposing dignity, shining brightly with a sense of intelligence exuding from within. Completely betraying the comment of "a handsome man who only looked good in face," his usual frivolity and idiotic temperament had vanished entirely.

"Yeah, I thought I was mistaken a number of times. I'm beginning to wonder if I need my eyes checked..."

"Sir Salvatore's face could not possibly show such a dignified expression. It must be someone who happens to look similar."

"I-I think a little more tact should be exercised..."

This was the godslaying Devil King whom anyone involved in Italy's magic scene considered troublesome to no end.

On further examination, his clothing was different. On top of a simple, white tunic was a white cape. He was dressed completely in white, giving off a refreshing impression.

Furthermore, he was carrying a long and thick blade on his back . A mighty sword measuring a meter in blade length.

"My minions."

Hearing the voice coming from Doni's mouth, Godou was surprised.

A woman's voice. Furthermore, it was that goddess Artio's voice!

"Once sufficient numbers are gathered, we shall invade this human city to deliver divine retribution upon these barbarians, along with the abominable godslayer these foolish people worship! "

After speaking loudly with Artio's voice, Doni drew the great blade from his back.

As expected of a master swordsman, his sword drawing posture was quite experienced.

Shining with the color of platinum, the mighty sword's blade shone with dazzling luster while bathed beneath sunlight. Undoubtedly, it was the Divine Sword of Salvation.

"This goddess hereby swears upon this sword. To vanquish all godslayers on the earth to accomplish the great task of the world's salvation. Minions, offer your lives for this cause!"

In response to the goddess's voice, the giant bear army began to roar.

Aaaa— Rrrrr— Toooo— Sssss—

Close to fifty giant bears were roaring together, sounding somewhat like a choir. Listening more carefully, it sounded like they were calling a certain name.

Artos. The name that carried the name of "hero."

"I can see a woman's black shadow behind Sir Salvatore. Is that Artio...?"

"Having lost her material body, the goddess possessed Sir Salvatore's divine body, controlling his mind... I am getting this kind of feeling..."

Yuri had apparently received a revelation through spirit vision. Liliana and Yuri exchanged nods.

The three of them were currently watching the commotion below from the hill of rock. Observing from a slightly closer position would probably result in goddess and Campione sensing each other's presence and entering a combat state.

In choosing this spot to land, Liliana's astute judgment had helped greatly.

Next, they should find Erica and Ena. Godou nodded at his two companions.

Part 4

Enveloped in blue light again, the trio flew towards the sky.

In his current state, Godou felt grateful for the existence of flight magic more than anything else. Riding was too tiring and would cause a great strain on his wounded body.

After leaving the place where Doni-Artio was witnessed, they flew for roughly thirty minutes.

This was roughly the same speed as a car traveling along a main road. Once the Roman colonial city of Colonia Agrippina on the Rhine's shore entered into view, Liliana lowered their flying altitude.

The city streets were on the Rhine's west bank while the east bank was a former Roman army outpost.

Godou's group landed outside this outpost.

After the great chieftain went missing, what happened to the Frankish warriors gathered here? The purpose of coming here was to ascertain this matter. A couple days ago, there were roughly three thousand men gathered here.

"According to rumors I heard in the city, after Sir Salvatore went missing, serious disagreements began to appear among the Franks. This included disputes such as whether to continue fighting the goddess or to return to their homeland."

"It would probably be best for those warriors if they simply withdrew their forces completely."

"Well, even if they went to fight a deity, lives would only end up sacrificed for nothing. But this kind of development isn't supposed to happen, right?"

After listening to Liliana's report and Yuri's opinion, Godou muttered.

They were currently bracing themselves against bone-chilling wind in spring while making these prophetic statements. In fact, along their way here, they were already getting faint but ominous premonitions.

Godou secretly glanced at the problematic outpost.

In terms of outer appearance, it resembled Augusta Raurica's castle where Godou had battled Uldin previously.

The north, east and south sides were protected by castle walls while the west side had the Rhine for defense. Also, disorganized cheering could currently be heard from inside the outpost.

The two girls felt rather puzzled but Godou decided it would be easier for them to understand by seeing with their own eyes. Hence, he led them through the castle gates without offering any explanation.

Wooooooooooooo—!

Wooooooooooooooooo—!

Wooooooooooooooooooooo—!

At the central square in the outpost, the crowd was yelling loudly. Of course, they were the three thousand Frankish warriors.

Their gazes were all focused on a certain lady. Standing on a podium was a graceful young beauty dressed in a white overcoat.

"Everyone! By the recommendations of many various people among you, I have decided to assume my position as the new chieftain. As you can all see, I am just an ignorant girl, so I shall be in everyone's care!"

Wooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo—!

Only while she was speaking did the yelling pause temporarily.

As soon as she finished, the shouts resumed. This seemed to repeat cyclically.

"Unlike the previous chieftain, Doni-san, I do not have the strength to protect everyone. However, I shall heal those who become injured in battle."

Wooooooooooooooooo—!

"And if just for a little, I too, am capable of using power that even gods will fear. Consequently, the goddess Artio probably cannot ignore me. —Should she arrive to invade, I intend to engage her in dialogue, imploring her to have mercy on all of you, the Frankish warriors."

Wooooooooooooooooo—!

"Never fear. If we hold negotiations, we can surely understand each other. If that doesn't work, I will also try to come up with other solutions."

Wooooooooooooooooo—!

"For the sake of Kusanagi-san who died to protect me, let us try hard and do our best. Kusanagi-san must have turned into a star in the sky and is now watching over us—That is what I believe!"

(...Umm. Isn't Godou-san clearly alive right now?)

(...Indeed. When was Kusanagi Godou killed?)

(Basically, she's the kind of person with excessive enthusiasm. She even gets along with Doni quite well. I also find her airheaded and prone to causing misunderstandings.)

She was making her speech in an adorable voice, amidst noisy and astounding cheering and shouting.

Godou and his companions were whispering in a conversation at the very back of the crowd. Yuri and Liliana were both making a speechless face while staring at Madame Aisha who was giving her speech on the podium.

"Oh, so this concludes the chieftain inauguration speech. But I suppose it would be better if I said a little bit more?"

Wooooooooooooooooo—!

"Well, let me think... My name is Aisha. My hobbies are reading, traveling, embroidery and cooking. Age—Age is exactly seventeen years old!"

(...Hey hey, it feels like she is starting to go out of control.)

Godou disregarded this fraudulent report of age while beginning to ponder.

Reportedly, neither Erica nor Ena were in the city—They were nowhere nearby, at any rate. Without anyone supervising her, once again, Madame Aisha had "spontaneously become the idol worshiped by the crowd."

...No wait, perhaps "once again" doesn't quite cut it.

During an era of turmoil and war, she has been like this "all along," right?

People could not help but feel drawn to the seductive charisma exuded by Devil King Aisha, worshiping her as their leader, seeking salvation from her.

Driven by her congeniality, she easily agreed to people's requests, then proceeded to run amok...

This was very possible indeed.

"She is a Campione too, after all..."

Godou patted the shoulder of a Frankish warrior nearby to make him turn around. This was for directing the man to call Madame Aisha.

"Oh my!? You're still alive, Kusanagi-san!"

"Since this is critical, I'll repeat myself. Don't go writing me off as dead so carelessly."

Godou's first words to Madame Aisha on their reunion was an instant objection.

After the chieftain inauguration speech, they were now meeting in a building that served as the Roman army headquarters.

"I-I'm very sorry. After the battle ended, you went missing so I naturally... O-Oh right, Doni-san has been possessed by the goddess's ghost, this is terrible."

"I know already. Speaking of which, what happened to Erica and Seishuuin?"

While the Madame tried to hide her embarrassment with an affectionate smile, Godou moved on to his next query.

Since Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi still had not awakened from its dormant state, Godou was unable to use it to contact Ena. This matter was what he wanted to confirm the most.

While Godou was worrying about dire possibilities, Madame Aisha smiled gracefully.

"Ah yes. Both of them are safe and sound. After the earlier battle, my consciousness grew hazy again then I received their help."

"Then where are they now?"

"I haven't seen them since two or three days ago. I was wondering if they might have set off in search for the missing Kusanagi-san."

The Madame's speculation was most likely correct. However, was going off without saying anything really the way those two girls went about doing things—especially Erica?

While Godou was thinking, Madame Aisha suddenly turned her gaze to behind him.

"By the way, who may these two be?"

"Oh, here are my companions who chased after us from the present due to various reasons..."

"A pleasure to make your acquaintance. My name is Mariya Yuri."

"I am Kusanagi Godou's knight, Liliana Kranjcar. It is an honor to meet you."

After the Madame shifted the conversation to them, the two girls spoke for the first time.

Yuri bowed her head politely while Liliana greeted with dignified politeness. No matter how friendly or casual the Madame behaved, they probably intended to adhere strictly to etiquette for Campiones who stood as monarchs.

On the other hand, the one whose position would be called queen—

"No, the pleasure is all mine... B-By the way, sure enough, both of you are also Kusanagi-san's l-l-l-lovers... Isn't that the case?"

In the middle of her greeting, her voice suddenly became very quiet.

Completely taken by surprise with the Madame's remark, Yuri and Liliana simultaneously went "Eh?" quietly.

"Aisha-san, I hope you can stop misunderstanding. Whether Erica, Seishuuin or these two here, they're all my friends, not that kind of bizarre relationship—"

"H-Here you go talking like that again! I-I know everything already!"

The Madame shouted at Godou for his interruption.

"Since Kusanagi-san represents the pinnacle of popularity, you not only took turns enjoying love adventures with two girls, but not satisfied with that, you also established a residence in the city

no different from a harem, intending to indulge yourself in a life of depraved lust."

"P-Please don't be ridiculous."

"So, aren't you having love adventures right now? Aren't you cohabiting with them?"

"..."

"...Indeed that is true. So even more girls will be added to that residence..."

"H-Hold on, Aisha-san, you're also one of the freeloaders living there. Aren't you part of the reason why the female ratio went up?"

Listening to their conversation, Liliana and Yuri both frowned.

Godou could feel the pressure coming from them while he was raising his objections. The Madame clapped.

"Oh right, I have something else to say about that. Since I have decided to assume my post as the new chieftain, I shall be moving over there."

Before the goddess's threat passed, she was going to live near the outpost, the Madame told them.

This was an important stronghold where the Frankish warriors and leaders gathered. Moving the chieftain's residence nearby was only natural. However, Godou said:

"I think it's better if you quit being chieftain straight away..."

"What are you talking about? Someone needs to take on the job of protecting the Frankish warriors from the gods."

"No, just leave the fighting to me. Also, could you please stop the reversal of your authority."

Earlier, when they were using Liliana's flight magic to approach Colonia Agrippina...

Godou noticed that the air was gradually growing cold. Even though it was clearly spring right now, the air felt like midautumn's. Also, he had also experienced the same phenomenon before.

That was before the duel against Uldin when the Madame had reversed her healing authority.

According to Madame Aisha, reversing the power she had usurped from the spring goddess Persephone would produce [Winter's Authority]—the ability to bring a freezing calamity to a vast region in the surroundings.

Deciding she must be prevented from using this power, Godou spoke up.

"No, I can't keep relying on your care and consideration, Kusanagi-san, this will be my fight next!"

Madame Aisha declared with great spirit. Furthermore, she even clenched her fist tightly with a solemn expression. This was a display of her fighting spirit.

"And in fighting for my protection, your body is already in this state, Kusanagi-san! To repay your kindness, I will dedicate my all to do my very best!"

"With this body—"

"Don't forget that I am a user of healing skills after all. Even without any visible, external signs, I can still sense vaguely whether a person is injured."

The Madame spoke softly in a devout tone of voice.

In addition, she was staring at Godou's chest intently as though seeing inside. Godou originally thought that she would not discover he was injured if he pretended to be lively and energetic—He had misjudged greatly, apparently.

"You suffered an internal injury from the last battle... My authority is ineffective against another godslayer, hence I cannot cure you, Kusanagi-san. But conversely, I shall meet the goddess in your stead. With my honor at stake here, I must resolve the matter!"

Madame Aisha's words were filled with sincerity and determination.

Furthermore, her declaration exuded solemnity as befitting someone known as queen.

Chapter 6 - Queen of Turmoil

Part 1

Erica Blandelli and Seishuuin Ena.

All news of the two had disappeared from Colonia Agrippina. Naturally, they had not left without reason. There were compelling reasons why it was necessary.

After the battle where the "King of the End" had descended—

Helping Madame Aisha mount a horse in her dazed state, Erica and Ena had brought her with them back to the city of Colonia Agrippina. However, Doni's body had been stolen by the goddess Artio.

More serious of all, their king, Kusanagi Godou, had gone missing...

"But I can still sense Godou's direction."

The next day after the hero's descent, Erica raised the issue in " Kusanagi Godou's residence."

In her hand was the pocket watch she often used, attached to a chain. Given the hair of someone she wanted to find, it could seek out their position—That was the magic she was using.

"Isn't that to the north of here... Approximately fifty kilometers northeast."

"That's quite far a place he went."

Hearing the results of the search, Ena remarked with deep feeling.

"But as expected of His Majesty. To think he managed to survive so miraculously!"

"As much as I'd like to hurry over to find out exactly what sort of miracle it was, this distance is a little far."

In the modern world, this distance would not have posed any issue at all.

However, covering this on foot or horseback would take a few days. Also, Godou's area was already outside of the Roman Empire's road network.

Searching along routes without paved roads would be even more time consuming.

"Our most pressing problem is still the Franks' situation after all ."

"Those misters are in disagreement and they're all impulsive people. So troublesome."

Erica frowned and remarked. Ena nodded with a bitter expression.

Despite surviving miraculously, Kusanagi Godou was very likely injured.

More importantly, Erica wanted to see her beloved as quickly as possible, but right now, she must suppress that impulse. Through Erica, news of "Salvatore Doni missing in action" had spread to the Franks.

This caused them to recognize Doni as slain in battle, resulting in a great turmoil.

Then the next day after the hero's descent, Erica and Ena held another meeting.

"Among the Franks who supported Sir Salvatore as the great chieftain, there are four other chieftains."

"Oh okay, that reminds Ena of powerful daimyos serving under the shogun's banner."

"This is similar to Japan's early modern feudal system? Well, they're essentially nobles serving the monarch whose family founded the country. Also, after Sir Salvatore's alleged death in action, the Franks' four chieftains each came up with their own respective course of action."

Course of Action 1: Inherit Doni's legacy, continue fighting the goddess's army.

Course of Action 2: Swiftly withdraw from Colonia Agrippina, return to their homeland.

Course of Action 3: Continue their occupation of Colonia Agrippina, but do not fight the goddess.

Course of Action 4: Using this place as a base, loot the immediate surroundings in the short term before retreating.

"Of course, it's best if they hurried and left without looting or doing anything!"

"That would be the choice with the least sacrifice and chaos. However, even if they plan on returning to their homeland, it still doesn't solve the problem, leaving them no choice but to cower each day in fear of the goddess's curse."

"But the fact that the Franks have been staying in this city is already quite weird in itself."

"True. Extras with no place on the stage should just make their exit. Once the battle with Artio and Sir Salvatore begins, who knows what could happen. It would be best if all ordinary people were gone from this area."

If necessary, Erica was fine with resorting to unscrupulous schemes. Also, there was someone here who was able to—rather, absolutely capable of—producing an effect.

Hence, Erica and Ena had gone to find Madame Aisha.

"I plan on leading the Franks' warriors to confront the goddess!"

Gathered with the Franks' three thousand warriors in the former Roman army outpost...

Standing in this kind of place, Madame Aisha declared as soon as she met the two girls.

"I was asked by those who wished to inherit Doni-san's legacy, hoping I could assist them. Also, the Franks are in a state of disarray due to the great chieftan's absence... Also, the current mood where they want to subject the citizens to atrocities is totally unacceptable."

Madame Aisha clenched both fists in a display of determination .

"Also, Kusanagi-san is absent so I must do my best. I intend to lead the Franks to have a meeting first with Artio-san who has stolen Doni-san's body."

"But Aisha-san, the Frankish guys are already divided in opinion, right?"

"Don't worry. I will go around and request everyone's support."

The Madame answered Ena's question nonchalantly.

Using the female Campione's authority of absolute charisma, all dissent was very likely going to be overturned, converting the Franks into her loyal believers.

Madame Aisha was a gentle and kindhearted woman.

Nevertheless, she clearly had no self-awareness regarding her bewitching charm...

"But Madame, once it turns into a battle between Colonia Agrippina and the goddess, severe casualties could very likely occur in the citizens. Also, the hardship suffered by the Franks as a result of the goddess's curse can be considered their just deserts, but it could end up involving inhabitants of this city apart from the Franks."

Erica was the one entering the conversation with an elegant tone of voice.

In order to stimulate the Madame's sense of benevolence and mercy, she deliberately raised the issue of the "populace." This was tantamount to remonstrating a Devil King Campione, but given the situation, it was quite necessary.

"I believe that that they should not suffer out of the blue. I implore you to reconsider—"

"Hoho, don't worry. Since preparations are already made to some extent, I intend to take the Franks and leave this city, to begin a journey in search of Artio-san."

" "....." "

This course of action could very well lead to another kind of commotion.

Just as Erica and Ena exchanged a glance, intending to offer a contrary view...

"By the way, Erica-san and Ena-san, I hope I can still receive your assistance. Let's all give it our best together, okay?"

After that, the two girls spent roughly half a day with Madame Aisha.

They accompanied the Madame to converse amiably with Frankish warriors in the outpost, women and children in the city, as well as talks with certain chieftains. Erica and Ena also heard from the Franks that they mostly held the view that "Madame Aisha was precisely the one suited to become the new great chieftain."

That night, the two girls parted ways with Madame Aisha who was staying at the outpost.

Returning to "Kusanagi Godou's residence" with the master missing, Erica came to sudden realization at the entrance. Ena also went speechless all of a sudden and started to think in reflection.

"...No way, Ena and you were struck by Aisha-san's authority too?"

Ena muttered.

When the two of them recalled their actions over the past few hours, they were quite stunned.

"Clearly Ena had no intention of accommodating her plan, right ?"

"Same here. Without any awareness of being charmed, we started to assist the Madame very naturally..."

"But why did we suddenly recover now?"

"Probably because we are both accustomed to magic and also possess much stronger magical power than ordinary people... That's why we were able to regain our senses."

Even the absolutely brilliant Erica Blandelli was in a gloom—

Feeling the impact of an unprecedented situation, Erica desperately put her mind into motion.

"Recovery was probably due to physical separation from the Madame, isn't it? But if we encountered the Madame again, perhaps we may be charmed again..."

"Hearing you say that, Ena feels like we will inexplicably want to see Aisha-san, right?"

"So you feel the same way too, Ena-san?"

Erica and Ena discussed the terrifying aspects of the charisma authority.

However, during the process, they would naturally recall the " gentleness" of Madame Aisha's smiling face, feeling a strange sense of admiration for the benevolent Campione—

Sensing this mindset, the two girls respectively said:

"Oh no! We must hide from Aisha-san... No, we must escape, right!?"

"Also, the farther away the better. Until this feeling of admiration subsides, we need to get to a place where we won't run into her so easily."

Madame Aisha's curse was probably alleviated by distance and time.

Based on this speculation, the duo of Erica Blandelli and Seishuuin Ena came up with this idea and made their decision.

Immediately entering the house to pack their luggage, they took out horses from the stable and instantly departed.

Despite being nighttime, the pair still went through the city gates and left Colonia Agrippina. Following the road along the Rhine for now, they headed south.

"Aisha-san mentioned earlier, right? About taking the Franks with her to seek the goddess Artio. But the other side is probably taking an army of those bears, right?"

"If the two armies meet, then a battle will probably begin directly..."

Madame Aisha and three thousand Frankish warriors.

As well as the bear army led by the goddess.

If the two armies met somewhere on a wide open plain, would a battle break out just like that? Fearing this possibility, the two girls spurred their horses to gallop.

"Ah, jeez. If only Ama no Murakumo could wake up, then His Majesty can be contacted."

"We must act with the worst outcome in mind. In order to stop both Madame Aisha and the goddess Artio, we must make preparations...!"

Ena controlled her favorite horse while lamenting the loss of the divine sword's assistance. On the other hand, Erica murmured with a determination on her face.

At this moment, Erica touched the small leather pouch hanging on her belt. Inside was a bronze pen, ink and papyrus...

It was two days after the "King of the End"'s descent when the two girls left Colonia Agrippina at night.

Three days later, Godou arrived at this same city together with Liliana and Yuri.

Part 2

Back to Colonia Agrippina, after the meeting with Madame Aisha...

Back to his residence in the city, Godou was welcomed by a lineup of thirty maids.

" " " " "Welcome back, master!" " " " "

The thirty young maids greeted in unison.

Since this was a luxurious mansion with a vast garden, the entrance was large enough to accommodate the thirty people gathered here. At some unknown point in time, the maids had procured a complete set of uniforms, resulting in a scene of grandeur.

Godou could not help but recall the maid cafe business run by his surrogate nephew, Lu Yinghua.

Finding the experience quite refreshing, Godou could not help but feel impressed.

"I see. So this is the harem situation the Madame mentioned."

"Godou-san is honestly... incurable..."

On the other hand, Liliana was muttering sardonically while Yuri sighed and remarked in a quiet voice.

Godou endured this embarrassment silently while approaching one of the maids. This was the daughter of Frankish nobles who had helped him during his patrols in the city.

"Master, I have a message from mistress Erica."

"Erica left it!?"

"Don't worry even if you return and find me absent. I will surely return later—That was what the mistress said."

Godou was told that Erica and Ena had suddenly left the house during the night, three days earlier. They looked like they were in quite a rush and departed without saying much, only leaving a message.

That night—

"It's really not like Erica's style to leave without saying anything in spite of the obvious situation here."

"Possibilities we could consider are..."

"Fears of pursuers. Or perhaps, Erica and Seishuuin Ena felt that it was necessary to set off even before deciding on their destination. It could very well be one of these two."

"If that were the case, Erica-san and Ena-san must be in quite a state of panic..."

Yuri's worried expression darkened.

Currently, only Godou's trio was present in the office, holding a meeting.

"Well, it looks like they're fine. Considering it's Erica, she'll always find a way to handle things appropriately."

"Yes. This conclusion suits those two quite well. Especially since Erica is a girl as wily as a fox, it is fine not to worry about her."

Liliana summed up the situation with a remark that seemed to express the trust and grudging relationship she shared with Erica.

"Right now, the greatest unresolved issue is still Madame Aisha going out for battle."

They had heard that Madame Aisha intended to leave Colonia Agrippina tomorrow, leading the several thousand Frankish warriors to negotiate with the goddess Artio.

During the daytime, Godou and his companions had witnessed the goddess in the gathering with the giant bear army. Most likely, the Franks' scouts had also discovered it and reported to Madame Aisha.

However, the army, several thousand strong, worshiped the Madame from the bottom of their hearts.

"They will surely lay down their lives to fight in defense of Madame Aisha. If those giant bears were to attack without notice... "

"Judging from the terrain where the two armies will meet, a field battle is very likely."

"The goddess probably won't consider any option apart from battle—That's so worrying."

Only able to imagine dark futures, the trio all began to sigh.

"In that case, it can't be helped. Let me follow Aisha-san. There are too many things that need to be done. Reducing casualties in the Franks as much as possible, resolving the matter of Artio and the Divine Sword of Salvation, recapturing Doni... I really have no idea how much my current body can do."

Frowning, Godou muttered.

"At least if my health was okay, I could stop Aisha-san forcibly. Imprisoning her somewhere would be a solution. But she's probably quite strong and I won't be able to do it the way I am now."

" "Eh?" "

Seeing the two girls show surprise on their faces, Godou answered with a serious expression.

"No actually, I've never seen her fight either, but it's just a feeling from instinct. I believe that Aisha-san should be quite powerful in contrast to her appearance and personality... Ahhh, rather than 'powerful,' maybe 'troublesome' would be a better way of putting it."

At this moment, Alexandre Gascoigne came to mind.

That man was also in a distinct category separate from powerful gods and other Campiones, troublesome to handle in his unique way.

"Regarding matters of combat, Godou-san's opinion is probably correct..."

Yuri nodded. Indeed, as the Hime-Miko with superb senses herself, she seemed to have recalled the exceptional instincts that Campiones displayed in areas related to combat.

Liliana instantly responded:

"In that case... In order to handle the Divine Sword of Salvation, the goddess who has obtained Sir Salvatore, as well as Madame Aisha, Kusanagi Godou needs to be cured as soon as possible."

At this moment, Godou sat down on a chair at the office desk.

But for some reason, Liliana swiftly came over to Godou's side. Because it was quite a natural movement, it did not feel particularly out of place.

"Regarding the reasons for your ill health, I have been thinking over it the entire time today and I feel that I have understood something. Let me go prepare a witch's elixir later. Hopefully, it will succeed in curing you."

While saying this in a serious tone of voice, Liliana swiftly moved her hand at the same time.

She placed a papyrus memo on Godou's lap while he was sitting on the chair. On it was written "I will visit you tonight." Obscured by the desk's position, her action was out of Yuri's sight despite being in the same room.

It looked like she was planning to apply magic directly instead of using medication...

Surprised as a result, Godou looked at the knight beside him. Liliana maintained her stern demeanor and simply responded with her eyes.

Lasting only an instant, her glance conveyed an astounding sense of seductiveness, causing Godou's heart to pound.

But at the same time, he could not help but feel that "this behavior isn't right."

Spurred by this impulse, Godou was just about to speak up when Yuri suddenly became startled.

"E-Excuse me. Actually, regarding Godou-san's injury, I have also seen something!"

A stiff and slightly abrupt suggestion.

Perhaps through her extraordinary spirit senses, Yuri had received a spirit vision ahead of Liliana. Godou immediately tore up Liliana's note.

"If Liliana-san's medication works, then my method is not necessary. However, if it is your wish, Godou-san, I-I can also..."

"B-But ever since antiquity, medical treatment has always been part of a witch's duties."

Finding the Yamato Nadeshiko, who was supposed to be quite conservative, following suit, Liliana began to falter.

"I think I should be more suited to this task after all..."

"A-Although that may be true, it is possible that there might be things that I may be of assistance..."

The two girls chose to compete using reasonable manners and tones of voice.

To avoid this type of situation arising, Erica and Ena had established an agreement. Now that things had developed to this, the one who should intervene between Yuri and Liliana was probably Kusanagi Godou after all.

Making his decision, Godou interrupted.

"Anyway, can I ask the two of you about the result of my wound's diagnosis?"

"Ah yes. This is something I felt subconsciously, Godou-san... Currently, rather than healing magic not taking an effect, it would be more accurate to say that your body has lost its ability to recover."

Seeing Yuri answer timidly, Liliana also stopped arguing.

"I feel the same as well. Have you noticed? The magical energy stored in your body currently is probably less than one seventh what you had before the injury. What we call magical power is akin to the concept of 'ki' mentioned in oriental medicine and

Chinese martial arts, namely, the mind and the body's energy itself ."

In order to allow a Japanese person unversed in magic to understand, she deliberately used the term "ki."

While displaying this type of considerate care, Liliana continued explaining.

"The toxin injected by the Divine Sword of Salvation deprives a Campione's body of magical power, hence resulting in a slow down of recovery speed."

"Then how do you think I can recover?"

Asked by Godou, the witch and the Hime-Miko pondered for a short while before answering.

"For example, there is the way Seishuuin Ena goes to sacred mountains far away from civilization to purify her body and mind, to allow her body to slowly absorb the sacred aura of the land. However, that method is too time consuming."

"I intend to use magic to transmit my own body's magical power to Godou-san."

"I also intend to use the same magic—n-no—to concoct an elixir of similar effect. But as a Campione, Kusanagi Godou's body contains a massive amount of magical power that ours cannot compare to at all."

"Will our level of magical power be able to produce an effect if we share it with him...? Actually, I am quite worried about this point."

Yuri brought up an uncertain element and Liliana nodded in agreement.

It looked like their diagnoses and methods of treatment were virtually identical. Furthermore, after listening to all this, Godou felt his mood relax and he smiled at the two girls.

"Thank you, both of you. I understand very well now. If the injury is only of that level, I'm not worried."

"G-Godou-san!?"

"Please do not say something so ridiculous! To this date, you have never wounded your body of a Campione's to this extent, right!?"

"Yeah, sure. But after all, the bodies of my kind are not ordinary to begin with."

How many months would it take to fully recover? With that worry in mind, Godou spoke up in cheerful mood.

"I think that all it takes is a life-threatening battle, then stuff like strength and magical power will automatically surge from the depths of the body."

" "....." "

This was something that Godou had experienced many times already, during every battle.

Also, as soon as he said it out himself, Godou felt quite convinced. As a godslaying beast, a Campione's mind and body fully approved of his unreliable suggestion. Furthermore, Godou could feel his body trembling with excitement.

Yuri and Liliana fell silent, wondering "Is that what you really think?"

"Anyway, I think that level of motivation won't arrive unless I'm confronted with a battle of life and death, so I won't be stopping Aisha-san for now. But don't worry, I will go with her."

"But Kusanagi Godou, I still think it would be better if you tried treatment first..."

"It probably won't be effective, right? In that case, just forget about it."

Finding the two girls slightly dissatisfied, Godou made his tone slightly more forceful.

"I don't like having to pick between the two of you on who is going to do this kind of thing. This is different from previous times . Well, it's not like I could request this from both of you at the same time, right?"

"P-Please do not say something so embarrassing!"

"V-Very correct, Godou-san. A-Although I cannot deny that it has not happened in the past, Godou-san, to think you would make such an outrageous suggestion on your own...!"

As expected, the two girls objected with embarrassment and anger.

Godou smiled at them as though saying "just kidding" and ended the conversation.

"Well, I think this is fine. Thank you for your care."

" "....." "

As though watching Godou's smile with displeasure, the two girls exchanged a glance in an attempt to probe each other's feelings. Then they both bowed their heads.

Godou was the only one relieved that he was able to keep the argument under control.

Then the next day arrived.

Leading the Franks, Madame Aisha left Colonia Agrippina and started moving towards the east of the Rhine—the interior of Germania.

Of the roughly three thousand warriors, a thousand stayed in the city.

This was for guarding the city as their stronghold together with noncombatants such as women, children and servants.

Even so, there were still approximately two thousand warriors accompanying the Madame, wielding swords, spears, axes, bows, arrows and various weapons, giving off an atmosphere of thugs overall.

Based on the actual situation, rather than "moving", it was probably more accurate to call them "marching."

Having joined the vanguard, Madame Aisha was riding a horse gallantly.

On the other hand, treated as one of the injured, Godou was mixed in the last group with the horse-drawn carts carrying supplies, sitting on a four-wheeled passenger cart together with Yuri and Liliana.

"We also saw scenes like training at the Roman army fort at the other city earlier."

Godou was on a specially-made impromptu bed on the cart.

Sitting cross-legged on it, he recalled his stay at the city of Augusta Raurica.

"Compared to the marching and field training the Roman army went through, these Frankish warriors are very... sloppy. They don't seem to have any precise rules."

The Roman army's infantry division would carry out strict training on a daily basis.

Hence the obtained results. In simulated battles, they were able to get into formation in an organized manner, displaying unity of movement. When on the march, they were able to move swiftly in defined groups and could take breaks efficiently. They were also highly experienced in setting up camps.

On the other hand, the Frankish group of thugs—

Could barely be considered gathered together, advancing at a sloppy pace while following the people in front.

However, due to their greatly varied armament, they were unable to get into proper formations. Consequently, the Franks never had any intention to actively group together in the first place .

"I remember Erica mentioning something about 'ten thousand Roman troops can defeat thirty thousand Germans' once, but now it doesn't look very surprising after all."

"Even when outnumbered by a factor of three!?"

"That was probably referring to the Battle of Strasbourg."

Godou's heartfelt mutters elicited an exclamation of surprise from Yuri while Liliana smiled wryly.

"The way I see it, the Frankish warriors gathered here are already quite used to battle. In a fight of ten against ten, I think the

Franks will overwhelm Roman infantry. On the other hand, if it were fifty versus fifty, Roman infantry will win for certain."

"Yeah."

"Using spears, shields and metal armor as standardized equipment together with infantry contingents that can swiftly enter formations, these are elements that can produce comparative advantages on ancient battlefields. More importantly, the Roman army maintained strict discipline and had a very refined commanding structure, hence allowing them to move as a group from one battlefield to the next in quite a rapid manner."

Gathered around the outskirts of Strasbourg was an allied force of Germanic tribes, numbering thirty thousand strong.

Ten thousand Roman soldiers intercepted them by using tactics to target their disorganized offensive and splitting them into multiple fronts. While the first row was valiantly resisting the barbarian's overwhelming numbers, the Roman army led by Emperor Julian entered the fray at an opportune moment and slowly reversed the tide of battle. In the end, they were able to obtain an overwhelming victory.

After Liliana finished talking about the exploits of how a losing battle was reversed, Godou said:

"Despite having such a powerful army, it was still the Romans who went into ruin at the end."

"The Western Roman Empire was swiftly declining while on the other hand, the barbarians kept bolstering their strength from various areas. This result can be considered perfectly logical."

"Now that's a story of earthly impermanence."

Sighing over the principle of rise necessarily followed by downfall, Godou continued his journey on the shaking cart.

With the goddess Artio's location as their destination, discovered by Frankish scouts serving Madame Aisha, they made their way across a wide open plain in Germania. Completely devoid of the speed and discipline of Roman armies, this was quite a disorganized march.

The shaking produced by horses was definitely not friendly for an injured body.

However, Godou could not allow frail girls to see him so useless. Godou looked for another conversation topic.

"It might be a bit late to ask at this point, but what's with the ' King of the End' which sounds like a nickname? What exactly is his real name?"

"That is a research theme that Prince Alec has been investigating for many years."

"I heard about the matter from Princess Alice when we were traveling to Bulgaria together last time."

Liliana brought up the name of the peer with whom Godou was not exactly on friendly terms while Yuri named the princess with the noble but relatively lighthearted personality.

After mentioning the name of the White Miko-Hime, Yuri murmured with deep thought:

"Despite searching for the 'King of the End' for eight years already, not once has she ever received a spirit vision regarding that hero's origins. As for why, the princess asserts the following."

"Asserts?"

"Yes. 'His name cannot be read from the source of spirit visions, the [Akashic Memories], because it has undergone special treatment.' The princess probably visited Plutarch's Residence in the Netherworld to confirm this matter..."

"Then speaking of which, the old man in that residence never mentioned the true name of the 'King of the End' throughout the entire time."

Liliana nodded. Godou recalled something else as well.

Back when the pale-haired hero manifested, the goddess Artio had definitely called out his name, but a clap of thunder at the time covered up her voice completely. Initially, the "King of the End"'s face was shrouded in shadow, obscuring his original appearance.

Perhaps these unnatural phenomena and the mysterious power preventing his true name from appearing in spirit visions were all caused by his intent to conceal his origins.

"As expected of a god, how utterly absurd..."

While they carried out this type of conversation with Yuri and Liliana in the shaking cart, the first day went by.

The second day was also similar to the first.

Then on the afternoon of the third day, the situation finally changed. Ahead of the Franks led by Madame Aisha, an army of a hundred and fifty giant bears was waiting.

Part 3

Crossing the Rhine together with over a thousand companions, they advanced towards the interior of Germania...

Although Madame Aisha prided herself on being used to traveling in general, she was actually quite used to group travel in this sort of racial migration as well. After journeying in various places, she would spontaneously find herself surrounded by crowds... This phenomenon happened quite frequently.

"However, I must be careful this time."

Clenching her dainty fists tightly, Madame Aisha murmured.

"I am heading off to meet a goddess who plans on killing every single one of the Franks. If I don't display a little intimidation, she'll underestimate and bully me."

Just as a precaution, she had already completed preparations for reversing the "healing authority."

Currently, the wind blowing around Aisha and her entourage was exceptionally cold.

Even though it was clearly spring, the wind was as chilly as though the season was midwinter. The air temperature dropped continuously, getting so cold that it would not be surprising if it snowed.

Once things had cooled down to this level, she was able to reverse her authority any time.

Aisha nodded. The "healing authority" was usurped from the Persephone, the goddess of spring. In actual fact, this goddess was also the queen of the underworld who ruled over the season of winter.

Whenever inescapable circumstances forced her to use this power, this authority always turned out to be unexpectedly useful.

"Although Kusanagi-san always treats me as a worrisome little sister, I must show him that I am actually the 'older sister'!"

With the greatly spirited Aisha as the rider, the petite horse trotted along its way.

As a side note, surrounding her nearby were the four Frankish chieftains, accompanied by two hundred of their direct subordinates on horseback.

Warriors on foot were also advancing steadily behind and on the left and right of this vanguard.

Also, a group of horse-drawn cargo carts carried food and other supplies, moving at the very back.

The Franks' two thousand warriors were marching in a disorganized manner, lacking in discipline.

However, there were also quite a few people, despite their barbarian origins, who had learnt logical army management from the Roman Empire, as well as those who had mastered this type of knowledge by their own methods. Examples active in this era included the conqueror, Attila of the Huns, as well as King Alaric of the Visigoths, one of the Gothic tribes originating from Germania.

However, none of the people gathered here seemed to possess this type of logical knowledge.

Anyway, mixed in the cargo cart group, Kusanagi Godou was watching this situation and thinking "as expected of people compatible with Doni..."

Godou recalled keenly.

Then on the third day after this disorganized movement began, a report came back. A small squad scouting ahead had discovered where giant bears were gathered and sent back a report.

This was a vast open plain with almost no cover at all.

A few small hills and rocks were scattered to some degree across this vast grassland within a couple square kilometers. Led by Madame Aisha, the Franks' two thousand warriors were advancing without any hindrance.

However, a group of beasts had already occupied one corner of this place.

These beasts were all bears, each measuring four or five meters in body length. Furthermore, there were close to a hundred and fifty of them.

Naturally, the giant bear army also noticed the approaching Frankish warriors.

A hundred and fifty giant bears all growled or made threats with their vicious visages.

In any case, the two thousand Frankish warriors drew their weapons in turn, yelling loudly for intimidation. Both sides displayed belligerent attitudes.

The hundred and fifty giant bears were separated from the Frankish warriors by several hundred meters.

However, the two factions were on the verge of battle. The slightest provocation would instantly trigger a combat state.

At this time, Aisha was currently at the forefront of the Frankish army.

"E-Excuse me... Everyone, could you calm down slightly?"

Riding on horseback, she looked back, tilting her head slightly as she pleaded.

Despite speaking at a volume that should not be able to reach all two thousand troops no matter what, the Frankish warriors in the back suddenly quieted down, displaying a polite state of standby.

Seeing the warriors so obedient, Aisha could not help but smile.

Despite some excessive violence and love for battle, these people were actually kind souls at heart.

"Hohohoho. Messrs Bear, you need to quiet down too♪"

Aisha made her "request" of the giant beasts several hundred meters ahead.

Although the giant bears remained ferocious, they all cast curious stares at Aisha.

"I knew it, true feelings can always be transmitted...!"

Despite being the minions of a violent deity, each and every one of them was a Mr Bear of the forest, fluffy and clumsy.

It is possible to get along with these children as friends, thought Aisha as she nodded. Naturally, this was also due to the assistance of the "charm authority."

Spurring her horse forward alone, Aisha approached the group of giant bears.

This was all done on whim. Aisha made a gesture with her hand to stop the Frankish warriors who wanted to follow her. Next, a young man walked out front from between the giant bears. ..

Dressed in refreshingly white attire, carrying a thick and heavy divine sword on his back.

He was someone bearing the same face as Salvatore Doni.

Emotional cries of "Great chieftain!" were heard from the Franks .

"Everyone, please quiet down! Doni-san's body has been stolen by the goddess! I will retrieve it, so please don't worry!"

She pleaded to the warriors wavering behind her.

Consequently, they went silent immediately. Feeling the Frankish warriors' trust in her, Aisha felt great warmth in her heart . At this moment, Doni spoke up:

"We have met before, third of the godslayers. To think you are able to tame my minions."

Sure enough, it was the goddess Artio's voice.

"What truly bizarre behavior. Do you intend to use this skill to make my minions attack me instead, thereby obtaining victory?"

"No."

Although their inborn ferocity had been weakened, the giant bears were still glaring angrily at the two thousand Frankish warriors.

The situation was now a face off between them and Doni-Artio's faction. Aisha called out.

In order to eliminate the resentment carried by the goddess, now was the time to put her secret strategy in action.

"I came here to make friends with you!"

"Hoh."

"I know that we have many unfortunate misunderstandings. But I still feel that provided we are able to put aside those differences and converse, we should be able to understand each other's thoughts and feelings."

"Hmm."

"I know it's very difficult. I am human while you are a deity. We differ completely in birth and upbringing. But even so, that should not constitute sufficient reason to prevent our hearts from connecting. After all, aren't love and benevolence things that both humans and gods possess alike!?"

"I see now. I understand completely."

"Yes, Artio-san!"

"Namely, you not only wish to cross blades against me in battle but also hope for mutual understanding. In a battle between heroes, pitting their utmost against each other, developing a sense of respect for one's foe is definitely inevitable. Not simply engaging in deathmatches motivated by hatred towards the enemy but also seeking friendship on the battlefield..."

"Yup."

"Very well. I am also a goddess carrying the name of the [Bear]. You have definitely conveyed your mettle to me. Then let us clash our blades to our hearts' content with fervor and intensity that inhabitants of the land shall sing of till the end of time!"

"Oh no, not that kind of interaction carried out with fist against fist!"

Aisha frantically tried to deny.

However, smiling with Doni's visage, Artio drew out the Divine Sword of Salvation while at the same time, a ferocious desire for conflict surged from all over the body!

"O woman godslayer, make your move!"

"Please listen to what others are saying!"

Held by Doni-Artio, the Divine Sword of Salvation released radiance.

This was the platinum light that was just as dazzling as the sphere of light that had appeared in the air previously.

But this time, only the blade shone with light, unlike the previous time when it had gone out of control. Probably due to having grown used to using the divine sword, controlling its power was now possible. Whether this was good or bad was still indeterminate.

In this instant, Aisha suddenly started to chant:

"Excuse me... O beautiful maiden, I beseech you to open the terrifying doors of esoterism..."

Spell words. For the sake of enacting an authority's reversal.

These murmurs originated partially without conscious thought. Had she not done so, she would have died. Warned by her survival instincts, Aisha's lips moved on their own. Swiftly, she also leapt down from horseback.

"Hurry and leave this place!"

As soon as she spoke, the petite horse galloped away. Perhaps thanks to the "charm authority" as well, Aisha's message was instantly conveyed.

Then Aisha turned her back towards Doni-Artio and began to run herself.

"O sword of salvation, let lightning be released!"

"Eeeeeeek!"

As the goddess's voice came from Doni's mouth, the divine sword in his right hand gave off lightning. Suffering the shocking impact of light and heat, Aisha was blown far away.

Like a log, she rolled along the ground.

"E-Ehhhh."

But completely unharmed, this was by the corrective force's grace.

To a certain extent, the "fairy's corridor" authority was also capable of manipulating history's corrective force.

For example, Aisha's presence in the current era could only be maintained if she did not suffer excessive injury. Both this time and the last, when she had been shot by Hunnic godslayer Uldin's arrows, were instances of the corrective force's protection.

Rolling on the ground, Aisha pondered while her gaze wandered.

(I-I knew it, this level cannot produce much threat...)

Artio was not [Steel], but just a mother goddess of the earth.

She intended to use the Divine Sword of Salvation to fight as a substitute for the body she had lost. However, this was not a power she was supposed to control in the first place. Hence, it was impossible for her to control it freely. Rather, letting the sword go berserk like last time would pose a greater threat.

However, Doni-Artio intended to conserve the divine sword's power and only controlled it casually. Hence, the reduction in power had the opposite effect instead. Weakening in power was no problem as long as the enemy could be slain.

"Were Doni-san and Kusanagi-san present, they would surely seize this opening to counterattack..."

After murmuring, Aisha's body suddenly shook.

When her rolling finally stopped, she instantly stood up and yelled:

"A-Artio-san! It's very dangerous, hurry and escape now!"

"What?"

The north wind began to blow, cold as frost, chilling wind mixed with snowflakes.

"Ice and snow—the power of a winter goddess!?"

Surprised, Doni-Artio's body was being frozen by the rampaging north wind. The cold wind rumbled and kept increasing in momentum.

This divine north wind brought the cold air of winter to Germania's wide open plain. Furthermore, the sky turned dark and bleak as white and tiny snowflakes began to fall.

"Oh no... I used it again..."

Aisha's shoulders suddenly slumped dejectedly.

As the goddess of spring, Persephone was a kindhearted young girl. Forcefully abducted by the god of the underworld, Hades, she became his wife and was taken to the realm of the dead.

But when winter arrived, she suddenly transformed into the cruel queen of the underworld, bringing freezing air to the world.

Furthermore, whenever the power of healing was reversed, " winter's authority" frequently executed Aisha's impromptu strategies mercilessly without hesitation.

It was as though Aisha's own temperament and principles were reversed as well.

"An attack going as far as to advise me to flee... If I do not take it on, my name as a goddess shall be tarnished!"

"Th-That's not what I mean!"

Currently, Doni-Artio held up the divine sword amidst the ice-cold north wind, mobilizing the magical power in a Campione's body to resist this authority.

However, the ground beneath the sword-wielding Campione suddenly collapsed.

Like a great earthquake—a crevasse appeared on the ground, dozens of meters long.

"Guh..."

The divine sword's user fell into the depths of the earth.

The underworld ruled by Queen Persephone existed deep underground. Consequently, the queen's authority not only included extreme cold but also the ability to drag enemies underground.

"This means that this area will become a world of midwinter for now..."

Powerful blasts of cold air flowed out from the crevasse where Doni-Artio was swallowed.

Although Aisha did not feel any discomfort herself, ordinary humans would freeze to their very bones if they spent long

durations in this area. In the worst case, they would freeze to death here.

But this time, what flowed out from the fissure in the ground was not just cold air.

'O woman godslayer, superbly done indeed.'

Hearing the goddess's voice coming from underground, Aisha shuddered.

'Even for gods, escaping from the underworld's prison is no easy task. The majority of gods would have no choice but to welcome death. Nevertheless, I am also a queen ruling the earth...'

Artio's voice carried neither anger nor hatred but tender affection instead.

'Please be patient and wait for now. I shall terminate this one-way journey and return to the surface once more. Before that, please allow my minions to serve as opponents to quell your boredom!'

"Oooh, sure enough!"

The secret technique of dragging enemies underground was immensely powerful.

Depending on circumstances, its power could deliver a one-hit kill. However, the majority of mother earth goddesses like Artio held identities as underworld goddesses as well, hence it was impossible to deal her an effective blow. Also, this technique was

also ineffective against divinities whose legends included "dying at one point but miraculously revived."

Furthermore, after Artio spoke—

Holding their positions obediently until just now, the giant bears suddenly began to riot.

Roughly a hundred and fifty giant bears were groaning viciously, making grim gazes and expressions at Aisha and the Franks while slowly moving in their direction.

"Everyone calm down! Please!"

Aisha clasped her hands together and prayed towards the giant bears.

But there was no effect. Recovering their ferocity, the beasts did not halt, continuing to approach Aisha and the two thousand Franks several hundred meters away.

The giant bears were the goddess's minions to begin with. Also, Aisha was meeting them for the first time today.

Hence, even the charm authority was unable to wield influence beyond "requests."

"Heeeeeee!"

'Hohohoho. Do not be mistaken, this is not all there is for the return gift!'

The goddess laughed heartily while starting a pursuit.

In the next instant, platinum radiance shone underneath Aisha's feet. No, not just underfoot but also the ground of her entire surroundings was glowing with light. This was the lightning of salvation released from deep underground.

Unlike the power of the neutralized lightning earlier, this was on a completely different level.

This time, the goddess did not bother with precise control, probably performing the attack without caring if it went berserk or not.

Engulfed by the exploding flash of light underfoot, Aisha's body vanished.

Part 4

The bear army led by the goddess Artio. The two thousand warriors of the Franks.

These two armies finally encountered each other. But rather than developing suddenly into a battle, they faced off, separated by a distance of several hundred meters. The two faction's leaders met at the midpoint to hold negotiations.

Madame Aisha's authority had dragged Doni-Artio into the bottom of the earth.

"Although I sort of guessed a little already, it really turns out to be a difficult-to-control power after all..."

Godou muttered. Mixed among the Franks, he had observed the meeting just now.

Just as a precaution, he had stood near the front row. The two girls who had brought Godou there, Yuri and Liliana, were also rendered speechless by the sudden developments of the situation.

"A-As much as she did not intend to fight, her authorities would automatically unleash themselves."

"Within Madame Aisha's authorities, perhaps all of them inevitably include aspects that cannot be consciously controlled by her own will..."

"Despite lacking any intent to fight, attacks are suddenly launched."

In a certain sense, her usual behavior and existence itself became feints and diversions during battle. Witnessing what was so scary about Madame Aisha, Godou frowned.

"Doni was right, it's definitely very sly..."

However, the battle did not end there.

Coming from underground, the goddess Artio's voice roused the bear army to go violent. Struck by the lightning coming from underground, Madame Aisha vanished from sight.

"Aisha-san!?"

Godou doubted his eyes. Impossible, how could that person be...

Furthermore, the hundred and fifty giant bears started to advance.

The giant bears had massive bodies, roughly four or five meters in length, and would look as big as a house if they stood up on their hind legs. In addition, all of the giant bears had gone violent, baring their fangs in a display of fighting spirit.

This army boasted of massive bodies while rushing towards the Franks.

GROWWWWWWWLLL—!

GROWWWWWWWWWWWLLL—!

GROWWWWWWWWWWWWWWLLL—!

The giant bears' incessant howling shook the air and the ground.

Faced with the giant bears that were arriving like a tidal wave, the Franks were clearly wavering due to having witnessed Madame Aisha's disappearance.

Every one of them shouting "Great chieftain!", they started to cry and scream.

However, someone among them yelled out:

"You guys! Aren't you going to avenge the great chieftain!?"

This yell's effect was quite pronounced. The men instantly changed their demeanor.

HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO—!

HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO—!

HOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO—!

The human faction also began to shout and charge.

Naturally, they were charging towards the tidal wave composed of a hundred and fifty giant bears. Wielding swords, spears, axes, bows, arrows and other weapons respectively, their bodies and minds were all fired up with determination and desire for vengeance.

On this wide open Germanian plain, the two armies engaged in an intense conflict—

The chaotic battle began.

Naturally, the giant bears were overwhelming in power if one were to compare one giant bear with a single Frankish warrior.

However, the giant bears numbered a hundred and fifty. On the other hand, the humans were two thousand strong. Simply by

calculation, ten people could challenge each bear with extra to spare.

A giant bear swung its stout front limb. A Frankish warrior fell.

The giant bears were biting with their vicious jaws and teeth. Screams and bleeding Frankish casualties began to appear on the battlefield.

This type of tragic scene could be found all over the battlefield.

Nevertheless, there were many powerful individuals among the Franks who were able to halt the giant bears' violent offensive using shields and agile movements. In addition, many more were able to stab their weapons into the giant bears' bodies that presented massive openings in their bestial, savage attacks.

As a result, this vast plain in Germania became littered with the corpses of beasts and humans.

"The fighting only started five minutes ago and there are already so many casualties!"

"I-If only Madame Aisha with her healing authority were still here at least..."

"Oh well, given who she is, I don't think she'd die so easily..."

Remarking respectively, every member of Godou's trio was currently far away from the battlefield.

They had stayed where they were when the Frankish warriors charged for the attack. This decision was made in order to avoid getting swept up into the violent chaos of the battlefield.

At this moment, Liliana took the bow off her back and wielded it in her left hand.

This was a composite bow used by equestrian tribes. Instead of wood, it was made from animal bones and tendons, a bow that could fire arrows from quite a long range despite its small size. Using her right hand to draw an arrow from the quiver at her waist, she placed it on the bowstring.

Swiftly, she fired, sniping a giant bear dozens of meters ahead.

The giant bear happened to be fighting savagely with Frankish warriors. With perfect aim, Liliana's arrow pierced the giant bear's right eye. Immediately, she shot a second arrow, this time sending it into the giant bear's left eye.

These two arrows not only skewered the eyeballs but also penetrated into the brain.

The giant bear was struck dead by the two arrows and collapsed. Witnessing Liliana's archery, the surrounding Franks shouted with excitement.

However, having exhibited these superb skills, the silver-haired knight shook her head.

"At this rate, the situation will deteriorate. Alone, I cannot annihilate all the enemies..."

"My body still can't fight..."

At least if one or another of Verethragna's incarnations could be used—

Godou gnashed his teeth in chagrin. Currently, not only did his body feel heavy as hell, but his magical power did not rise at all. Perhaps due to this, despite the battle having started already, he could not think of which incarnation should be used.

Yuri leaned herself over as though worrying for Godou's condition.

Feeling grateful for her care and consideration, Godou began to push his mind to think. Just as Liliana said, the situation was going to deteriorate. In that case, a risky gamble must be taken—!

Then just as Godou intended to start this gamble...

"...Dragon?"

Liliana suddenly looked up, staring at the southern sky.

Godou also focused his eyes. At first, all he could discern was a black dot, but after a while, he immediately saw what was flying in from the south.

Roughly four meters in body length. Similar to an agile theropod in form. However, instead of stubby forelimbs, it was soaring in the sky using a pair of wings that sprouted from the shoulders.

The strong hind legs each had a thick claw at the end of its foot, a sharp weapon supposed to be called the "terrible claw" that the flying monster was born with.

Unmistakable. This was one of the pterosaurs under Uldin's control.

Furthermore, riding on the pterosaur's back was a glamorous blonde beauty—

"Erica!"

Godou could not help but call out her name.

"What's the matter, Ena-san?"

"Is it imagination? Ena feels like someone is calling your name, Erica-san."

Seeing the black-haired Hime-Miko's surprised look, Erica asked her.

Exceptionally gigantic bears were currently engaged in a chaotic battle with the Frankish warriors below.

The pterosaur easily glided in the sky ten-odd meters above the ground. Erica was the one holding the reins and mounted on the saddle. Sitting behind her was Seishuuin Ena.

"His Majesty could very well be down there!? Did he discover us!?"

"That would be ideal if it were the case. Considering it's Godou, being present at a great commotion is totally not surprising at all."

"His Majesty really tends to get drawn into things like battle and conflict."

The pterosaur borrowed from Uldin was able to glide effortlessly despite supporting two people's weight. Hanging on Erica's neck was a pendant made from a dragon's tooth with a string through it. This was also given by Uldin.

Apparently, his pterosaurs could be tamed in a matter of days, provided one possessed this object.

Due to the issue of riding skills, Ena did not borrow a pterosaur. Essentially, these pterosaurs could be controlled similar to how horses were ridden. However, it was relatively difficult for the Hime-Miko who was still a novice in this area.

"Thank goodness we made it. However, I can't seem to find Madame Aisha and the goddess who possessed Sir Salvatore's body."

"Oh well, it's already time to get into action."

The Hime-Miko of the Sword smiled happily and reached out. Taking an arrow from the quiver hanging on the saddle, she handed it over to Erica.

"There is no question that these bears need to be dealt with."

"Well said. Then, let's get on with it!"

Erica took down an iron bow from the saddle.

An iron bow was used to give arrows range and power beyond conventional. Even a burly and muscular man would have extreme difficulty drawing this bow. However, Erica had already augmented her arm strength using magic.

Taking the arrow handed over by Ena, she effortlessly pulled the bowstring.

This was mounted archery performed while riding a pterosaur. Erica's feet were supported by the two stirrups hanging on each side of the saddle.

Relying on the assistance conferred by this equipment, Erica shot the first arrow—

Whoosh!

Howling like a strong gust of rapid wind, the arrow flew towards the battlefield below.

Erica had already applied iron alchemy to all of the arrows, a spell to increase penetrative power. Combined with the iron bow's

power, the arrow easily skewered a giant bear's body that was as large as a house.

Having penetrated the enemy, the arrow did not lose momentum and embedded itself into the ground.

The targeted giant bear collapsed with a crash and stopped moving. Dead on the spot.

The skillful archery required to pierce a moving beast's eye was quite superb. However, achieving the power of a one-hit kill required aiming for the relatively less mobile torso—in particular, sniping the heart was the most efficient.

This bold sniping was repeated ten times continuously, carried out from the air.

In rapid succession, ten arrows pierced the giant bears nearby, producing ten corpses.

Fighting with all their might in the bears' surroundings, the Franks stared in shock at the airborne reinforcements. However, there was no time to pay attention to them.

"Go to a place with many bears. Let Ena down!"

"Understood!"

Since this was a wide open plain, there were also open spaces in addition to areas where the density of people and bears were high.

Using the pterosaur's mobility effectively, the duo swiftly moved to the air above another zone of intense battle. Ena instantly jumped down. Indeed, directly from the pterosaur's back!

Like a cat or a monkey, the agile Hime-Miko landed lightly, descending on the battlefield.

Usually, she wielded the divine sword, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. But right now, she was holding in her hand a broad sword in its sheath—Rather than a Japanese sword, this was a western double-edged sword.

"Cuore di Leone! Help Ena-san right this instant!"

The magic sword in Seishuuin Ena's hand responded to its master's request. The silver blade shone faintly with light.

Normally, Erica used Cuore di Leone in the form of a slender sword. On this occasion, she had returned the sword to its form as a longsword, lending it for Ena to use as the divine sword's substitute.

"Yahhhhhhhh!"

Wielding the magic sword of the lion in the stance of *hassou-no-kamae*[3], Ena ran.

In order to be swung hard with two hands, Cuore di Leone's hilt was quite long. Consequently, it could wielded in the same manner as a Japanese sword.

Armed with this magic sword, Ena rushed towards her target—naturally, one of the giant bears.

Although the giant bear was being surrounded by six Frankish warriors, Ena breezed past the warriors like the wind and jumped with movements as agile as a monkey's.

With the giant bear standing on its hind legs, its head was roughly five meters above the ground.

Ena jumped up high, slashing at the giant bear's short neck using the stance of hassou-no-kamae. The enemy swung its thick forelimbs, trying to tear the Hime-Miko's delicate body apart.

However, Ena and Cuore di Leone did not stop moving.

The lion's magic sword first chopped off the giant bear's elbow then proceeded to sever its head in one flowing motion.

Compared to wielding Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, the sharpness and power was equal.

"Next!"

Having slaughtered one giant bear, Ena immediately turned and ran towards a second one not far away.

The second giant bear was surrounded by Frankish warriors as expected, but again, Ena squeezed through them and slashed at the giant bear's body with the magic sword. Cuore di Leone's blade pierced into the area below the ribs, chopping the abdomen horizontally without hindrance. With the blade buried deeply in its liver, the second giant bear was also effortlessly struck dead.

"That's rather magnificent."

While praising her rival, Erica did not stop either.

Seeing her quiver empty, Erica waved her hand and used summoning magic. Hence, ten-odd arrows instantly appeared and could be shot again.

Erica controlled the pterosaur while continuing to snipe the ground from the air.

Every arrow shot out was accompanied by the creation of a giant bear's corpse. This repeated like mass production. In this manner, she and Ena continued to clear away the giant bears. Once

the surrounding enemies had been exterminated, Erica made the pterosaur descend.

It so happened that there were several Franks below.

Seeing the pterosaur descending overhead, they began to panic.

Running towards where the pterosaur was descending, Ena jumped with agility, landing behind Erica neatly. With two passengers again, the pterosaur flapped its wings violently to ascend.

Erica and Ena had already defeated nearly twenty giant bears.

However, there were still a great number of them. While having the pterosaur soar, Erica looked for her next prey.

"Their clean manner is really quite absurd..."

Watching Erica and Ena's active performance from afar, Godou muttered.

Due to the separation of four or five hundred meters, their detailed actions could not be seen clearly, of course. However, judging from the way they flew around the battlefield on the pterosaur, they were evidently victorious again and again.

For those girls, the most important aspect was being individually powerful.

Furthermore, in order to apply this power effectively, they made maximum use of the pterosaur's mobility, fighting all over the place with fervor.

This was an active performance that only those two could achieve, in command of both power and clear minds.

Meanwhile, standing by Kusanagi Godou's side were Liliana and Yuri. The silver-haired knight was obvious, but even the Hime-Miko also possessed extraordinary powers. In the past, she had employed the spirit power of psychic sensing to protect Godou from the goddess Circe.

The two of them were staying by Godou's side to protect him.

Despite being far from the chaotic battle's center, a few giant bears approached on occasion in search for prey. Every time this happened, Liliana shot the bear dead with arrows.

"Thanks for the help, both of you."

Another giant bear was slowly approaching. Godou instantly said quietly:

"No need to protect me anymore. It's fine if you leave me alone."

Saying that, he started moving towards the giant bear.

Yuri went "Godou-san...", intending to chase after him but Liliana shook her head and placed a hand on Yuri's shoulder. Presumably reminded of what she "should be doing," the

Hime-Miko immediately stopped and with a worried expression, watched Godou leave.

"Kusanagi Godou..."

Despite worrying as well, her dignified and beautiful face tensing up, Liliana watched him silently.

During this time, Godou continued to walk. Still injured at this point in time, even his footsteps were unsteady. Nevertheless, he still forced himself to continue, finally facing off against the giant bear one on one.

GROWWWWWWWWL!

The four-meter giant bear howled loudly and stood up on its hind legs. This was a threat made by displaying its gigantic body.

Next it swung its left arm, intending to strike Godou viciously with its massive paw and claws.

In response, Godou desperately moved his unsteady body, jumping backwards and successfully evading at the last moment, However, the tip of the bear's claws scratched his chest slightly. Searing pain wandered over his chest as blood splattered.

"Gah—!?"

Enduring the pain, Godou focused his concentration.

Currently, he needed magical power no matter what. He need to raise his fighting spirit to rouse combat power from the depths of his body—

However, he could not feel any signs of power surging forth. Godou was shocked.

At this moment, the giant bear pounced, intending to crash into Godou's body, tearing the enemy apart with its vicious jaws and teeth. Simply being struck by this giant body would crush someone to death easily.

Moreover, in contrast to its gigantic body, the giant bear moved rather quickly.

Whether escaping left, right or backwards, there was probably no time. Hence, Godou swiftly dodged "forwards." Rolling forwards, he slid beneath the pouncing giant bear.

GROWWWWWWWL!

The bear growled as though displeased by its two failed attacks, glaring grimly at Godou.

On the other hand, Godou was getting anxious. Despite fighting like this already, challenging an opponent that he definitely could not defeat in his current state of health, there was no surge of power at all.

His magical power had not recovered either. Speaking of which, Liliana had called magical power "ki."

Could it be possible that he needed to use some kind of special ki technique? Such as special breathing or meditation... No, he had never done any of that before.

In other words, all Kusanagi Godou needed to do right now was—

"Just do the same as always, huh?"

Muttering thus, he stopped moving and stood upright.

Naturally, the giant bear attacked with great intensity, swiping with its front limb again. However, this time Godou did not evade. Instead, he clenched his fist hard.

"Yahhhhhhhh!"

Charging at the approaching giant bear instead, he attacked with his fist accompanied by a shout.

Ultimately, dodging alone could not be considered fighting. Only when both sides attacked each other did a fight occur. More importantly, no matter how much he defended, Kusanagi Godou never gave up the will to attack!

That said, this was undoubtedly foolish behavior.

After all, he was using this body, incapable of wielding any authority, to fight a giant bear that was more than double his own size.

However, that was precisely why he was filled with tension, his throat becoming parched. The effects of excitement and adrenaline dispelled his weariness and for the first time after so many days, his heavy body exhibited agile movements once more. Furthermore, while confronting the fear of death directly, the so-called killing instinct of "I must crush this enemy before me!" surfaced.

Godou's dynamic vision was quite outstanding to begin with.

This was combined with the concentration Campiones exhibited in battle.

Even when the enemy attacked with bestial speed, he could easily see through the attack exceptionally clearly. Godou just barely evaded the giant bear's hammering fist and leapt to the gigantic beast's chest at the same time. Then he struck as hard as he could.

—GROWWWWWWWWLLL!?

The bear screamed pitifully.

Grabbing the opponent's giant body with both hands, Godou raised the bear high above his head. Toyed with like a barbell by a 180 cm human, the giant bear made a troubled expression on its face.

Unconcerned, Godou tossed the giant bear with one hand like a ball.

Tracing out a parabola, the giant bear's body flew over a hundred meters, landing on empty ground by chance.

The giant bear lay there, not moving. Naturally, this astounding feat could not have been accomplished by Godou's usual state. This was the result of using the [Bull], only available when the enemy possessed mighty strength beyond humans.

Phew... Godou took a deep breath.

Willpower, honed under attack, as well as massive amounts of magical power were flowing out from within Godou's body.

Still, although he recovered just as expected, putting this sort of prediction into action really turned out to be a most terrifying gamble... However, there was no time for catching one's breath.

Roughly two kilometers away, there was a giant fissure in the ground.

That was the underground entrance that had devoured Doni-Artio. Right now, giant beasts were slowly crawling out from this crevasse.

Thirty meters in body length. A form that resembled some sort of owl-bear hybrid.

This was the kind of divine beast that Godou had encountered previously. Fallen to the depths of the earth, Artio's spirit must have sent them to the surface. Furthermore, there were three of them this time!

"The one unblunted and unapproachable, oath-breaking sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

Godou immediately chanted spell words.

"Those are divine beasts!? The goddess Artio's minions!"

Riding the pterosaur, Erica was soaring the skies magnificently.

Naturally, she was able to survey the ground more clearly than anyone else. At a crevasse that sliced deeply across the plain like a wound, giant owl-bears were crawling to the surface. Also, there were three of them in succession...

Divine beasts had suddenly appeared on the battlefield.

Furthermore, there were still fifty-odd giant bears remaining on the ground.

Clearly in a disadvantaged position, Erica frowned. The Franks on the ground finally lost their will to fight as well. Due to the appearance of the giant owl-bear, the warriors were in turmoil and starting to flee.

However, next to appear was a pitch-black giant boar—

Seeing that, Erica smiled fearlessly, flying on her pterosaur.

Wielding Cuore di Leone on the ground, Ena also noticed. No matter one's location on the battlefield, no one could possibly miss the gigantic [Boar].

Also, the Hime-Miko of the Sword also noticed the recovered presence of her "partner."

"Ama no Murakumo...! From the arm of the one whose interests I shoulder, come to my hand!"

Since she was currently holding Cuore di Leone in her right, the jet-black divine blade manifested in her left. Ena proceeded to summon Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's divine aura into her body while calling out to the sky at the same time.

"Erica-san!"

"Yes. Cuore di Leone, return!"

The magic sword vanished from Ena's hand, reappearing in Erica's right hand. This was summoning magic.

"This was where Susanoo no Mikoto started his uprising, leading a thousand savage gods, a thousand swords standing upon the earth, used as city walls to defend against the enemies!"

In order to control the divine sword, the Hime-Miko of the Sword instantly chanted spell words.

"The sword of a thousand was lost and turned into a little snake . Nevertheless, His Augustness obtained a sword from the great serpent's tail. Namely, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. The steel that breaks a thousand blades!"

Having just received Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, the Hime-Miko of the Sword tossed it high up into the air.

Infused with the power of miracles, the divine sword spun as it flew like a boomerang, reaching an altitude even higher than where Erica's pterosaur was flying. In this very instant, it crumbled and scattered.

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's fragments rained down on the ground like a meteor shower.

The divine sword's fragments all fell on the giant bears on the ground. These fifty bears were scattered over an area of two hundred square kilometers on various parts of the battlefield.

The giant bears all crashed down at the same time, collapsing in death.

However, there was not a single victim among the retreating Franks.

Only picking out the enemies and piercing them in one strike—This was the amazing skill displayed by Ena and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

"And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them!"

Meanwhile, Erica chanted the spell words of smiting.

Cuore di Leone transformed from a longsword to a lance.

This was the barbed lance used by cavalry. Furthermore, the flying dragon rider was enveloped in red light—The instant she was surrounded by the [Sacred Privilege of Extermination], Erica lightly kicked the side of the pterosaur's belly.

"Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword!"

Thrusting the lance's tip forward, she ordered the pterosaur to fly at full speed.

Her target was an owl-bear that had just crawled out to the surface from underground. Erica and the pterosaur were charging at the throat of a giant divine beast that stood as tall as a building.

The owl-bear spewed green flames from its giant jaws as a counterattack.

However, these flames were deflected by the [Sacred Privilege of Extermination]. The dragon rider charged at the enemy's throat, piercing the lance's tip deeply into it.

GWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!?

A deep scream shook the atmosphere. This was the very instant when Erica dealt a massive blow to the first divine beast.

Chapter 7 - Impossible Battle

Part 1

ROOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAR!

The [Boar]'s howls reverberated across the battlefield.

Using the smiting spell words to strengthen herself and her dragon mount, Erica started her assault as a sacred dragon knight. Ena also summoned Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, making a comeback as the divine sword user.

The enemies were three owl-bear divine beasts. However, their master Artio was currently not by their side.

Seeing the situation advantageous to his side, Godou nodded greatly.

"Godou-san, you finally recovered!?"

"Then we should head over. We must support Erica and Seishuuin Ena!"

Naturally, the two girls running over were Yuri and Liliana.

Godou discovered that the silver-haired knight was holding a slender pouch, thirty by twenty centimeters in size. It looked quite heavy.

"What is that?"

"Authorized for only a single use—A trump card. Even in a battle against divine beasts or gods, it will surely be effective."

Although Liliana's reply only served to pique Godou's curiosity, there was no time for chatting.

Since getting to the bottom of the matter was not essential, Godou turned to other issues instead.

"So, while Artio is still sealed whereas Erica and Seishuuin can easily win on their own, we should do something else first."

"Of course, I shall help... So, what needs to be done?"

"I want to request the two of you to tell me what you know about Artio. Because she should be back soon, this is still necessary . Then there's one more thing."

Godou answered Yuri's question calmly.

"My body still feels heavy, so I want to use magic to heal it. The same as always."

" "....." "

"I also think it's quite bad for me to be troubling you all the time , Mariya and Liliana. I'm very sorry that I'm imposing my willful request on you again. But very soon, I will need to fight."

Soon, the battle against Doni-Artio would begin.

There was nothing more important. Battle preparations must be swiftly completed. Bearing these thoughts, Godou spoke honestly and bowed his head.

"So that's the situation. Will you help me?"

"K-Kusanagi Godou. Helping you in and of itself is not a problem at all."

"Th-This task for us—requesting the two of us, w-what on earth is it...?"

"Exactly what the words mean. Did I express myself poorly? I'm referring to having both of you together applying stuff like magic to me."

Godou gazed straight at the two surprised girls.

"I don't like having to choose only one over the other between you two. Since you are both present, if I must request this sort of thing... I want to request both of you together."

"Y-You are saying such outrageous things with a serious face!?"

"Y-Yes. Godou-san, that is too indecent!"

"But by now, hasn't this happened several times already?"

There were the times before the battles against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven or Lancelot. Naturally, Godou also clearly remembered the "customary ritual" undertaken with Erica and Ena together recently.

Yuri and Liliana were probably recalling the same. Their faces suddenly went red.

"Either way, Godou-san here is not of right mind, is that not so!? "

"I agree. Perhaps right now, due to the reckless way he recovered his body, even his mind has gone weird!?"

The girls remarked one after another. However, Godou shook his head.

"No, it's actually the opposite."

" "Opposite!?" "

"Right now, I feel like I've returned to my original state of mind, or put it another way, back to the origin. Or maybe I should say that I've come to understand the importance of being myself... In any case, that's the feeling."

This was probably influenced by the way that he deliberately made himself realize strongly about "doing the same as usual" during the battle against the giant bears.

Furthermore, a large amount of magical power was currently seething all over Godou's body right now. Finally, he had retrieved his source of power. This provided maximum honing of the body and mind, as well as his activated thought processes.

Calling it worked up would be slightly inaccurate.

"Without unnecessary impurities, the 'pure self' honed to unprecedented levels—That's what I feel my current state to be. In actual fact, you can see that I'm still my usual self, right?"

"I-Indeed, you do not look like you have lost your presence of mind..."

Compared to the time when Godou was on a rampage due to Lancelot's curse, he was currently closer to the times when invoking the [Youth] incarnation dispelled all ambivalence to reach a state of serene lucidity.

Next to Liliana who was cowering, Yuri sighed deeply.

"...Of course, I understand this as well, Godou-san, but if this really is your true nature, stripped of all pretense... Then you are utterly incurable. I believe that it is a disposition no different from a fiendish brute's."

"Sorry. You are quite right on this point, Mariya. I have no words to refute at all."

"Being like this despite knowing fully in your heart, that is where you are incurable, Godou-san."

Yuri sternly whispered while coming over to Godou's side.

Then bowing her head shyly, she murmured in a voice so quiet it was almost inaudible.

"H-However, I have already made a promise with that kind of person to follow him forever..."

Despite strongly chastising Kusanagi Godou's faults, she also fully accepted everything about him.

This was the girl named Mariya Yuri.

Godou could not help but embrace her in his arms. Despite accepting his slightly violent behavior, the frail Yamato Nadeshiko slightly pushed with her arms to resist as though trying to oppose their bodies from pressing intimately together.

"N-No, Godou-san. D-Did you not say you are requesting for both of us?"

"Mariya Yuri! Are you actually planning to accept Kusanagi Godou's suggestion!?"

"B-Because it cannot be helped either..."

In Godou's arms, the Hime-Miko quietly sighed.

"Liliana-san, you should know already. Godou-san is the type who goes all the way once his decision is made, even to the point of fighting gods obstinately."

"Mariya, I'm sorry that's the kind of man you have to follow."

"Godou-san, n-not yet—"

Godou tenderly approached Yuri's face and sealed her lips.

Resisting this hug, she mustered strength in her arms again, trying to push Godou away. Nevertheless, her lips softly accepted the boor's mouth.

Yuri's tongue clicked as she sucked on Godou's inserted tongue.

In response, Godou whispered "Mariya..." With ecstasy written on her face, Yuri nodded.

"You are still addressing me that way even in this kind of situation... Did I not tell you already?"

"Mari—Yuri..."

"Here I am..."

After he called out her name, Yuri responded with soft whispers, full of bliss, accompanied by intoxicated breathing.

Next, Godou and Yuri turned their gazes towards the silver-haired knight together.

Always straitlaced, Liliana Kranjcar was enduring their gazes with a troubled expression. Then she returned a meaningful gaze.

"N-Not only Mariya Yuri but I am also someone you need? For the sake of fighting the goddess."

"This goes without saying. You are also someone I need."

"Assisting Godou-san all on my own would be a bit difficult, after all..."

A shared mood was produced between the three of them.

With unsteady steps, Liliana walked over to the other two. Then suddenly, she kissed passionately. Hugging Godou's head tightly, she proceeded to kiss him directly.

Her lips, beautiful as a fairy's, sucked audibly on Godou's lips. After licking Godou's lips for a while, Liliana inserted her tongue into his mouth in search for his tongue. Once she found her target, she boldly wrestled them together.

As though trying to make up for the minutes lost due to delay, her fervor was quite intense.

"I-I will stay forever by your side. As your knight... As your woman, I shall respond to your requests no matter how unreasonable. So, let me as well—"

"Liliana..."

"I-I will stay by your side. So let the three of us—"

Seeing Yuri quietly bringing her face near, Godou stopped kissing Liliana for now and sucked the Hime-Miko's lips instead.

This kiss continued for a long time, their saliva mixing together, with mucous membranes harmoniously making mutual contact.

When Godou opened his mouth for a change of air, it became Liliana's turn to kiss.

The knight's lips sucked the lord's lips, writhing as though enjoying the sensations.

"Although I know that saying this is very inappropriate... My heart is pounding nonstop."

Liliana whispered softly.

Then with knightly fervor, she greedily sought Godou's lips before releasing her mouth.

Seeing Liliana pant and breathe with satisfaction, this time it was Yuri's turn to draw her face near, attentively receiving Godou's lips that were approaching to kiss.

Then Liliana planted a light peck on Godou's earlobe.

This inspired Godou with a sense of mischief and he buried his face under Yuri's chin, letting his tongue and lips slide over the Hime-Miko's pale neck.

"Mmm... Mmmmm."

Yuri's body shuddered and swooned while a moan leaked out.

Then the trio faced one another again with Liliana and Yuri taking turns to offer their lips to Godou. Not only that but the two girls also sucked Godou's lips together, licking with tender affection.

By the time he noticed, the sense of lethargy hanging over Godou's body for the past few days had already disappeared.

The two girls had applied healing magic to him.

Finally, his body was fully recovered. While kissing, the silver-haired knight spoke to Godou as he nodded:

"Virtually all the legends regarding the goddess named Artio are lost by the time of the modern age..."

"Even so, considering you two, you were able to see something, right?"

"True, but this is unacceptable, Godou-san. To think you are relying on the power of spirit vision like this."

On the other side, with kissing accompanied by reprimands, Yuri was talking.

"Because seeing something does not frequently come so smoothly. Due to good fortune this time, I was able to see the goddess possessing Sir Salvatore's body, hence sensing various things."

"I too, managed to barely see a few things. Please make use of it. .."

Sometimes taking turns, sometimes simultaneously, the two girls kissed Godou's lips.

Accompanied by such behavior, a vast amount of information also flowed into Godou's body at the same time, regarding the goddess with the name of bear, as well as her son.

Feeling the sword's spell words completed, Godou clenched his fist forcefully.

Next, the violent howls of a divine beast were heard.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAR!

The cry of a pitch-black gigantic boar. Turning his gaze over, Godou found all three of the owl-bear divine beasts lying on the ground, their bodies collapsed into powder, gradually turning into sand.

As expected, divine beasts were no match for the [Boar] plus Erica and Ena.

Having achieved glorious victory and completed its mission, the [Boar] roared and disappeared.

Then Uldin's pterosaur descended from the sky. Riding on the pterosaur's back was Erica with the reins in her hand while Ena was sitting behind her.

"You're here just as I thought, Godou!"

"Your Majesty! Ena missed you so much!"

After jumping off the landed pterosaur, Erica and Ena instantly ran over—Only to be shocked.

Originally supposed to be left behind in the modern age, Yuri and Liliana were now beside Kusanagi Godou. Furthermore, they were both giving off unusual airs while sticking intimately to Godou.

Then Ena finally spoke up in a troubled tone of voice:

"Uh, why are Yuri and Liliana-san here? By the way, what are you three doing... Ah, hmm, what would be the proper thing to say right now?"

"E-Ena-san!? Th-Th-Th-This is, of course, the customary ritual!"

"Erica... Umm, we came for the sake of helping Kusanagi Godou , so we are simply doing what is perfectly natural and expected—"

Three of the girls in his surroundings were in panic. Only Godou in the middle remained calm and composed.

Erica sighed deeply and strode over determinedly.

"Godou. No matter the time or place, you really are someone who always exceeds my expectations. With this, I now understand completely. I can't believe you even summoned Lily and Yuri, who are not supposed to be here, to indulge in pleasure or whatever."

"Well, there are many circumstances on our side as well."

"And my, aren't you quite composed? Have you gone weird from some kind of curse again...? No, you have suddenly changed your attitude and started facing your inner heart with honesty."

"You can tell?"

"Of course. I am the girl who has always stayed by your right hand side. I can't believe you did this without my permission—It's truly unforgivable! However..."

After making a strong assertion, Erica suddenly went speechless.

Surrounded by Yuri and Liliana's embrace, Godou held out his hand towards Erica, causing the blonde beauty to frown. Nevertheless, she still took up his hand and walked over.

Finally, confronting Godou face to face, Erica murmured slightly indignantly:

"After all, Ena-san and I have been together with Godou for the past half a month, so we're not in any position to criticize."

"I see."

"Or perhaps, things in this area are going according to your plans?"

"Of course not. I'm not smart enough to accomplish this kind of thing."

"Apparently so. Not only do you do things as you please, but you're also very adept at ordering us around, that's the kind of talent Kusanagi Godou possesses. Truly unforgivable as a person. So, what sort of magic do you need? As one would expect, knowledge about Artio, isn't it?"

"Including that, there's also my imperfect state of health."

"Oh well."

By the time he noticed, Erica had already approached even closer than Yuri and Liliana.

During the conversation, she had gradually drew near and was now close enough to the point of being right in front of Godou's eyes and nose. Caressing Godou's face gently, she spoke while sighing.

"Since I'm already informed of the situation, I should be helping too... That must be what you're thinking."

"If you could do that, that'd be a relief for me... Ouch."

Erica pinched Godou's face lightly then whispered with a seductive gaze:

"Please endure this briefly, you should wholeheartedly accept a reprimand of this level. Also, Godou, you should be telling this to another girl apart from me, shouldn't you?"

"Well, of course."

Erica gestured with a slight glance, prompting Godou to look at the direction she indicated. As a result, the tardy Ena was suddenly startled and ran over.

"E-Ena too, as long as it helps Your Majesty, Ena will do anything no matter what!"

The Hime-Miko of the Sword also ran to Erica's side and looked up at Godou.

Standing tall at 180cm, Godou inevitably caused girls to look up at him.

After he nodded at the girls in front of him, Erica and Ena tiptoed together, trying to bring their faces close to his. Hence, Godou bent down to accommodate them.

"I must allow you to be able to fight without reservation..."

"And this is Ena and everyone's job..."

As soon as Godou finished kissing Erica, he immediately kissed Ena.

Then he alternated between the two girls, engaging in mutual sucking, liking, savoring. Erica and Ena accepted Godou's lips in turn, responding with sucking and bold movements of the tongue. Occasionally, the three sets of lips would intimately entangle with one another, making it impossible to tell whose saliva was whose.

Last time, there was the night of the trio's reunion at Colonia Agrippina.

At the time, the three of them had engaged in similar behavior, but interrupted in the middle as soon as they regained their senses.

But now, the trio's suppressed feelings from that time were set ablaze once more. Godou, Erica and Ena indulged themselves as though in a dream.

During this time, the two girls also delicately applied healing magic to Godou.

To be frank, Godou's ailments had already been cured earlier—

Furthermore, Yuri and Liliana were dumbfounded by this sudden development. The silver-haired knight abruptly recovered from her surprise and spoke up without warning:

"K-Kusanagi Godou's premier knight is me. I cannot hand over the necessary duties to you all...! Mariya Yuri, this is too early for you, allow me to take over here—"

"What are you talking about!? E-Even someone like me, I am still able to help Godou-san!"

Liliana and Yuri hugged Godou's left and right arms respectively.

Consequently, Godou took turns in kissing the lips presented by the girls. The ritual ended up being conducted with all four girls together.

Part 2

Running out of control in this manner, the aberrant ritual finally came to an end.

Recovering consciousness, the quintet endured unprecedented embarrassment. With Godou in the center and Erica beside him, along with Yuri, Liliana and Ena, they all looked very uncomfortable.

Despite being a long-awaited reunion between the five, no one could find words to speak.

After all, they were well aware that they had gone too far, knowing fully that "mental confusion caused by magic or authorities" could not be used as an excuse for their behavior.

However, Liliana murmured to speak up at last:

"What an utter embarrassment for me... But it is all because of Erica. No matter what, you should not have forced your way in like that. Knowing you, I am quite sure you were well aware that no further magic was needed, right?"

"W-What are you talking about, Lily? That was clearly just an excuse!"

"Speaking of which, I have been curious ever since just now. It feels like Erica-san and Ena-san are getting along much better than before..."

"Well, that's because ever since arriving in this era, we've been through thick and thin together. It's not like it was prompted by some kind of special occasion, honestly, there really wasn't!"

"I-In any case, the current problem is Doni and Artio!"

Despite being the principal war criminal, Godou forcibly changed the subject.

If what he engaged in until now was considered "high-speed driving," then this would be "normal-speed driving." In many ways, staying in "a honed state" indefinitely was not possible.

"By the way, Erica, I'm surprised you were able to borrow Uldin's dragon."

Erica and Ena had set off on their journey a week ago. However, reaching the forest where the Hunnic godslayer resided would take almost a month even on horse.

Even water routes would not work. Unlike sailing downstream, this required going opposite to the Rhine's flow, which meant that the trip should take quite a few days.

"I used magic to send a letter to Ruska and Clotilde, asking them to come over. If Uldin's pterosaurs were used, it takes less than half a day to fly to this area."

Erica replied. Worried about Madame Aisha's charm authority, she and Ena had fled Colonia Agrippina. Then after settling down at a suitable city, she had written a letter and used [Mailing] magic to deliver it to Uldin's fortress.

"...Oh yeah. There is that kind of magic!"

This was magic for instantaneously transferring light objects such as letters to a specific location.

Godou recalled how Erica had used it many times in the past.

"Well, although Ruska and Clotilde helped to persuade, it still took quite a lot of effort to mobilize Uldin. In the end, we provided information from our side."

"Information?"

"Yes. Basically, if things go well, he would be able to conquer Colonia Agrippina effortlessly. Then there was the appearance of the Devil King-slaying god, easily capable of slaughtering three godslayers. I suggested that he should come nearby to confirm the veracity of these two facts."

Not only making this type of request on account of the alliance but also stimulating Uldin's desire and curiosity.

This really was something that Erica would do. Reportedly, the Hunnic godslayer was currently in the outskirts of Colonia Agrippina with his two wives, discreetly observing the situation.

It was possible that he was currently watching the battlefield from somewhere.

"If Godou is slain in battle here and only Madame Aisha is able to return alone, Uldin will probably attack Colonia Agrippina with delight. So, how is the Madame currently?"

This time, it was Godou's turn to explain the situation on his side.

After getting a rough summary across, they heard the sound of joyful cheering.

Due to the appearance of the three owl-bear hybrid divine beasts as well as Godou's rampaging [Boar], even the Franks were struck by fright.

On top of that, there were also a pterosaur-mounted female knight and a swordswoman wielding a black demon blade.

When it first started, the Franks all ran away from these unknown people, but as the giant beast battle gradually intensified , they gathered in one spot.

Roars of the giant beasts—particularly the [Boar]'s—went as far as to shake the sky, causing the air to ring from the aftershock of supersonic waves.

The ground shook violently when the [Boar] ran. It was like an earthquake.

This situation not only brought terror to the warriors but also stimulated their primitive sense of faith. Alas, this was undoubtedly a battle of gods, bringing the end of the world, that was what they thought...

There were roughly two thousand Franks taking part in the battle.

Casualties amounted to roughly one tenth of them, no longer able to fight. Although the able-bodied ones would probably disapprove of their fleeing comrades, quite a number of people were being abandoned on the battlefield.

Before they knew it, the Frankish warriors were overcome with terror and pain, causing them to stop fleeing.

However, the owl-bear divine beasts were all defeated right in front of them.

The [Boar], the dragon rider and the demon sword user had left already. Saved from a crisis, the Franks were filled with joy, experiencing something known as liberation.

Nevertheless, this only lasted but a moment, because a man was floating up from a fissure in the battlefield.

Despite bearing the same face as the man whom the Franks respected as their great chieftain, he was already dead. The

goddess, who bore a grudge against the Franks, had stolen his remains and was now controlling his body.

"Hohohoho. Well then, let us continue the fight."

In fact, what came from his mouth was the voice of a young woman.

The warrior proceeded to draw a thick and heavy blade, raising it towards the sky. Countless sparks appeared high in the air. This scene greatly resembled a night performance of dazzling fireworks .

However, these fireworks did not dissipate, instead remaining above the Franks in the sunny sky above—

"Well then, crude barbarians... Where are the godslayers protecting you? If they do not show themselves, it cannot be helped. Then I shall first bring divine retribution upon you all."

Surviving and returned from underground, the warrior approached the Franks.

Countless sparks were still shining brightly high up in the air. All it would take was for a portion of these lights to fall down and all the Franks would be annihilated effortlessly.

Just at this moment, someone among the warriors called out " Lady Aisha!"

This became the start. All the warriors began to call out. Lady Aisha, Our Lady the Holy Maiden, please bring us salvation,

extending your hands of mercy towards us, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha, Holy Maiden Aisha—

"We beseech you to grant us salvation, Holy Maiden!"

This rowdy commotion was caused by the charm authority's curse combined with being cornered towards the abyss of death.

Then after that.

From high above—a rainbow glow of light descended from between the clouds in humanoid form.

This glow drifted gently to the ground, turning into a beauty in a white overcoat the instant it landed.

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

Intense shouting and yelling resounded throughout this plain in Germania.

Indeed, Madame Aisha was supposed to have been devoured by the lightning of salvation.

Bluntly stated, she did not actually die. As the saying went, never two without three—As implied by this proverb, fortune's blessing opened the [Fairy's Corridor] once again.

This was the exact same method of evacuation used against the Divine Sword of Salvation's first attack.

However, using this power exhausted Aisha greatly. It also made her utterly famished.

Also, on her return to the battlefield, Doni-Artio was also revived together with the divine sword, with the sparks of salvation's lightning scattered high up in the sky. In addition, there were the Franks, cheering for the Holy Maiden's name—

"Oh dear."

Aisha happened to land in between Doni-Artio and the Frankish warriors.

Standing in the middle, she coughed drily once. After trying to make her face as dignified as possible, she turned to face the Franks.

WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

The warriors responded to her with joyful cheers of surprise. Feeling happy about this, Aisha waved to the warriors.

She could hardly contain the delight she was experiencing inside.

Since the divine sword-wielding Doni-Artio was approaching, she turned to face the goddess's direction.

"You have revived as well, woman godslayer. In that case, allow me to send you and those barbarians to the grave together. Hoho, what sort of strange tactics will you attempt to use to attack me next?"

"Why are things like this... When fighting only causes a chain reaction of hatred and sadness..."

Doni-Artio was pressing forward for a head on battle.

Her fierce words brought a sense of sadness to Aisha's happy heart.

Artio was a tragic goddess who had forgotten love. If possible, Aisha really wanted to save her. However, a desperate crisis was now approaching Aisha and the Franks. What should she do?

"Our Lady the Holy Maiden!" "Please save us, Lady Aisha!" " Please grant us mercy, Holy Maiden!" "Please offer us your hands of salvation!" "Our Lady the Holy Maiden!" "Holy Maiden!" "Our Lady the Holy Maiden!" "Holy Maiden!" "Our Lady the Holy Maiden!" "Holy Maiden!" "Our Lady the Holy Maiden!" "Holy Maiden!" "Our Lady the Holy Maiden!" "Holy Maiden!"

The people's voices came nonstop from the back.

Everyone was praying, hoping to obtain protection. Everybody was wishing for the arrival of a savior daring to oppose the gods. Also, she was currently the only one capable of protecting them!

Phew. She took a deep breath. Driven by the situation and the mood, Aisha made her decision.

"Right now, I have almost no power remaining..."

Due to entering the corridor for an emergency evacuation, she was already thoroughly exhausted.

The queen of winter's authority had already ended due to using the trump card, [Underworld's Descent], and had returned to a healing authority. However, her healing powers were temporarily reduced after reversing the authority.

Right now, Aisha's body did not have much of anything that could be called strength.

"Even so, I still wish to protect everyone! No, I will protect you all!"

Absorbing the people's cheering, an authority inside Aisha's body stirred from slumber.

No matter how perfect her body's condition, this could not be used without the populace's support. Conversely, given their support—the voices of those seeking protection—No matter how exhausted her body, this authority would still bestow Aisha with the "power to defend the populace"!

"Awaken, soul of steel! Exhibit to the world the sword's lack of mercy!"

"Hmm—!?"

This was the divine ability that Aisha had reluctantly usurped from a dragon-slaying hero.

Confronted with the imminent activation of the authority named by the Witenagemot as the [Jabberwock Slayer], Doni-Artio was dumbfounded.

High in the air were the sparks summoned by the Divine Sword of Salvation. There was also the immense cheering, singing in praise of the Holy Maiden.

Seeing Doni-Artio and Madame Aisha revived, Godou's group went near where the Franks were gathered. Just now, Godou had asked Liliana to use flight magic.

Then upon seeing the newest monster, Godou was greatly shocked.

"Another new monster appeared!"

"Could it be a new minion that Artio summoned!?"

"N-Not that..."

Next to Godou and Erica, Yuri whispered in a trembling voice.

The Hime-Miko's gaze was directed towards an olive-skinned beauty dressed in a white overcoat. Apparently blessed with a spirit vision's arrival, Yuri revealed the oracle in a solemn voice.

"The one who summoned that thing should be Madame Aisha...!"

"A-Aisha-san is the one who summoned that dangerous thing!?"

"Speaking of which, the Witenagemot's report did have records. The Madame apparently has an authority that can summon an unidentified weapon..."

Ena was rendered speechless. Liliana murmured as a result of recalling what she had read.

Godou's quintet raced towards the center of the commotion. Doni-Artio and Madame Aisha were currently facing off in front of them. Numerous sparks were shining brightly high up in the air.

Furthermore, there was a steel monster hovering in the air.

A warrior with an armored upper torso. However, the warrior's obese physique looked rather comical. Protected all over by steel armor, not a single inch of skin could be seen.

From head to waist, the height was over ten meters tall.

Unbelievably, the lower half was "mist."

Black mist was spreading out from the waist's location.

Also, black rocks resembling coals were continuously spewing out from various joints and gaps in the armor. These rocks rained down on the ground like black bullets. These rocks ranged greatly

in size, from that of human heads to giant boulders capable of crushing entire houses.

On the other hand, ordinary humans would definitely be severely injured or even die if struck by any of these rocks, no matter which size.

The rain of rocks also fell upon the Franks' location, causing them to evade desperately in all directions. Even so, they still wanted to watch over their great chieftain's battle—

"Everyone!"

Madame Aisha cried out loudly.

"Staying here is very dangerous, so please do your utmost to escape! As long as it is on the level of injuries, I will help heal everyone later!"

Warned to evacuate from the danger, the Franks started fleeing all at once. Roughly two thousand warriors scattered in all directions one after another.

The fleeing warriors were all loudly yelling "uwahhhhh, uwahhhhh!"

While this was happening, the spewing of black rocks finally ended. Only black smoke came out from the armored archdemon for now.

"O lightning of salvation, crush the godslayer's avatar!"

Doni-Artio gave orders, causing the sparks in the sky to change immediately.

Flickering, the countless sparks formed the shape of a long snake, attacking as a "serpent of lightning." Naturally, the target was the smoke-spewing armored archdemon.

The serpent's lower jaw was stopped by the archdemon's left gauntlet that was of comparable size.

Enduring the attack the archdemon opened its right hand to manifest a longsword of steel. But in that very instant, the "serpent " biting its left hand released electricity from all over its body.

Naturally, being in close contact with the serpent, the archdemon suffered a violent shock.

Gaps in the armor violently spewed out a great deal of steam and numerous fireballs.

Speaking of fireballs, they would be more accurately described as flaming chunks of rock. The rocks fell on the ground, causing fires to spread through the vegetation on the plain, burning intensely. In the worst case scenario, this could lead to a great fire disaster.

The archdemon spewed off fireballs when damaged—

Using humans as an analogy, this should be equivalent to bleeding. However, the archdemon endured the painful blow and stabbed the summoned longsword into the serpent's body. As a result, the serpent's form collapsed and scattered as sparks.

The archdemon's longsword had returned the damage inflicted by the lightning aggregate.

However, after scattering for a few dozen seconds, the sparks formed a serpent again.

This time, the great snake wrapped its long serpentine body around the archdemon's armor, then released electricity. Suffering the second electrical strike with its full body, the archdemon stopped moving.

Steam and fireballs once again gushed out from the gaps in the armor.

This time, probably more than two hundred fireballs fell to the ground. However, sharp blades suddenly popped out from the five fingers of the archdemon's left hand, the one not wielding the sword.

Using this hand, the archdemon reached towards the serpent, squeezing its throat, burying the five blades into it!

As a result, the serpent scattered into numerous sparks, collapsing again. But immediately, it recovered its serpent form and pulled back slightly to face off against the armored archdemon .

Then the two combatants attacked with sword and lightning respectively.

Both sides suffered damage, causing the archdemon to spew many fireballs again while the serpent's form collapsed for a few dozen seconds. This scene was repeated nonstop.

This stalemate battle was a fruitless slugfest.

"Aisha-san, what the heck is that thing!?"

"Oh Kusanagi-san, your body has already recovered. Thank goodness!"

As Godou ran over with the four girls, the Madame smiled radiantly to welcome them.

To think she was able to see that Godou had recovered fully, Madame Aisha's eyes were truly amazing.

But while this was taking place, the armored archdemon continued its battle, spewing fireballs towards the ground as though bleeding from the damage received...

These fireballs shot quite far away, ranging from hundreds to thousands of meters.

Although the scattered Franks had already fled the battlefield, these fireballs were still able to reach them.

Of course, they were not going to stand still foolishly to get hit. The warriors fled even faster.

All the fireballs basically traced out parabolas while being shot into the distance.

Being directly under the archdemon, Godou's group and Madame Aisha were quite safe. Well, that said, there were some fireballs falling nearby and getting caught up in the intense battle was very likely.

"Did you really make that armored monster come out, Aisha-san!?"

"Yes, summoned in order to protect everyone—the Franks—This is my avatar."

"The issue of protecting aside, isn't this completely dangerous?"

"This cannot be helped. After all, a power to protect everyone is still armed force, a tool of battle... Whether those who wield weapons or those who rely on weapons for protection, all shall meet their ruin as a result of weapons. The archdemon's authority has always been telling me this principle..."

"But no matter how noble your explanation, you still ended up summoning that thing."

Madame Aisha had clasped her hands together before her chest as though in prayer, closing her eyes.

Despite carrying the righteous banner of "protecting the people, " armed force was still armed force after all.

These were truly golden words that should be heard properly by every shounen and shoujo battle manga protagonist who yells " I don't need a power that hurts people, instead, I want a power for

protecting those who are precious to me" while simultaneously abusing the use of ultimate techniques and weapons of mass destruction.

Even so, characters wielded armed force while chanting such slogans for the sake of protecting people...

This seemed to be turning into meaningless deconstruction, so Godou went for a change in mood.

"Anyway, Aisha-san, you're completely occupied with sustaining that armor, right?"

"Ah yes. That's pretty much the feeling."

"I understand. Then I'll find a way to handle the rest."

Godou motioned to his companions with his eyes. Cover me when necessary was the message conveyed.

Then Godou began to advance, aiming to engage the enemy. Namely, he was walking towards Salvatore Doni's body that was approaching with leisurely footsteps together with the goddess Artio's spirit.

Despite the leisure pace of walking, this did not mean the enemy had effort to spare.

In order to control the Divine Sword of Salvation wielded in Doni's right hand, Artio's spirit must expend the majority of her concentration towards it.

With thunderous crashes, fireballs kept descending on the battlefield.

In a corner of this battlefield, Godou was finally engaging Doni-Artio in a duel, one on one.

Part 3

"I am the strongest, holding all victory in my hands—"

Godou chanted spell words to start using another incarnation.

This was the [Warrior], wielder of the blade to sever the goddess Artio's divinity.

"You're gonna lose for sure unless you still have something up your sleeve... I'm going all out now."

A hundred or so spheres of light manifested around Godou, shining as brightly as a galaxy of stars.

Naturally, these were the sword's spell words. In response, Doni-Artio made a straight thrust with the divine sword in her hand, pointing the blade at Godou.

"I must have already mentioned. Do know that I wield the sword for slaying Devil Kings, yes?"

"Ultimately, that sword is not for you to use. Also, you almost died from your fight with Doni earlier and even gave the majority of your life force as an offering to that 'King of the End' guy. As a result, you're already all beaten up to begin with."

The [Warrior]'s powers also included the ability to gain a deep understanding of the opponent's condition.

Godou could tell that Artio was not simply covered in wounds. In her current state, it would not be surprising if she were to vanish any moment.

"I really wish you could leave the earth as soon as possible and live somewhere secluded like the great spiritual world..."

"Do you think I will listen to such advice? Godslayer!"

Doni-Artio slashed with superb swordsmanship.

Evidently, she still had strength to spare for swinging a sword. Truly splendid swordsmanship. However, Godou dodged quite calmly, thanks to the [Warrior]'s powers of observation telling him the timing of the strike.

Since things had come to this, it could not be helped. Godou had no choice but to counterattack with full power.

If possible, he wanted to neutralize the enemy in a slightly safer manner without annihilating the goddess. But before considering that, he had to obtain victory first!

"Artio! Your name carries the meaning of 'bear.' In Celtic culture , this is a symbol of warriors."

Godou muttered in order to control the spell words of the [Sword].

"The Celtic Helvetians worshiped you. They are the tribes inhabiting the land we now recognize as Switzerland. The goddess Artio was the queen of the earth that they worshiped. Furthermore , she was revered as the fierce goddess of war by the warrior social class..."

Floating in Godou's surroundings were the many spheres of light—the sword's spell words.

Accompanied by Godou's chanting, these light spheres flew towards Doni-Artio. This was a cutting attack that no swordsman could defend against, akin to machine gunfire.

"O blood of the evil dragon Fafnir, bestow upon me the fate of invulnerability..."

Salvatore Doni's lips composed spell words. A man's voice.

In that instant, over a hundred Norse runes surrounded Doni's body. Rushing towards his body, the sword's spell words were all deflected and proceeded to disappear.

This was the authority that had given Godou great trouble before—the [Man of Steel] that made the user virtually indestructible.

"What are your intentions, Salvatore Doni?"

"Oh my, it's because the goddess's power seems to have become quite weak."

As expected, the man's voice replied to Godou who was frowning from the unexpected interference. Doni-Artio's face began to show the usual frivolous smile.

"Thinking I probably could retake my body for a bit, I tried it out."

"What I mean is why the heck are you getting in my way!?"

The instant Godou scolded in anger, Doni's idiotic face resumed its dignity and intellect.

"To think you would resort to such petty tricks to break free from my control, godslayer. No matter, you shall act as my arms and legs for the time being."

"Well, looks like taking my body back completely is a bit hard."

Both of these remarks came from Salvatore Doni's mouth.

However, it started with the goddess Artio's voice followed by Doni's original voice. Furthermore, his face was working overtime to accommodate the shifting modes between intellect and idiocy.

While Godou was dumbfounded by this bizarre performance, the comedy duo continued to converse.

"I have a suggestion. Since I can help out like just now, let me manipulate my own body. With that, you can concentrate on controlling that whatever divine sword while allowing me to duel Godou as well."

"What!?"

"Mutually beneficial, I think it's a very good idea."

"Still a man whose words are full of madness and insanity..."

"No no, I'm very serious here. Kusanagi Godou and I are both fated rivals and dear friends at the same time. The relationship's quite complicated. Without this kind of opportunity, I won't get a serious duel. That's because Godou is a guy who cares a lot about appearances and won't do it without a special reason."

"Hmm... Despite the eccentricity, this suggestion is not bad..."

A conversation conducted by one person playing two roles was unbelievably developing towards cooperation.

Like hell you're gonna succeed, saying that, Godou once again summoned roughly a hundred spell words of the sword. In that instant, Doni-Artio's released black mist that swiftly burrowed into the ground.

Furthermore, the man, whose body had been possessed by the goddess until just now, smiled frivolously.

It was a bright and cheerful but foolish smile, reminiscent of the Mediterranean sun. Undoubtedly, this was his original look.

"Come! If you want to annihilate Artio, defeat me first!"

Doni-Artio was still holding the Divine Sword of Salvation.

However, the stance was completely different from before. He was simply standing with the divine sword dangling in his right hand. An undisciplined standing posture where one could feel neither the intent to attack nor defend.

Now this was the posture born from the foundations of Doni's sword of mental nothingness. Godou gulped.

"Artio's spirit already left, right!? Even if you want to act like an idiot, get a grip on yourself!"

"You're right and wrong at the same time. The goddess's spirit lingers slightly in my body. She can instantly return if she wanted to. Nothing less expected of a ghost!"

"Like I said, why are you trying to get in my way!?"

Godou shouted at the foolishly gigging Doni.

Meanwhile, Godou's companions had gathered here as well. Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena. They neither said anything nor acted redundantly, simply silently watching the battle that was about to erupt between Godou and Doni. This was probably out of concerns that one should not recklessly get involved in a duel between Campiones.

High above, the archdemon was still battling the "serpent."

However, the armored archdemon had imperceptibly gained the advantage. The serpent was now enduring violent attacks unilaterally and even suffered many swings of the archdemon's sword. With every attack of the archdemon's, the serpent's size gradually grew smaller.

Godou frowned.

Was it possible that Artio chose to ally with Doni for some other purpose than focusing on the archdemon's fight?

"Hohoho, thinking about unnecessary things can be very dangerous. I hope you'll keep your eyes on me properly."

"Shut up. This is my brain so it's my freedom to think about whatever I want."

Grumbling, Godou pushed the incomprehensible puzzle aside.

He glared at Doni again. As much as he hated to admit, this man was right.

"Damn it. The troublesome things causing changes to history are getting even more complicated!"

"Okay okay. This is also our destiny. That of standing in opposition on this ancient stage, a fight with the world's fate on the line—"

"Like anyone would accept this kind of absurd destiny. This man-made disaster is all caused by you!"

"Oh dear, I seem to think that you're responsible for 30% or so."

"I knew it, you do have some level of self-awareness. Also, I'm only responsible for 20% at most."

Godou declared while carelessly grouping himself with Doni as birds of a feather.

"It can't be helped. I'll agree to a duel, so promise me. If I win, you'll stay obedient and listen to my orders until we return to the modern age!"

"No problem, of course. But you have to beat me first!"

"Say all you want. You ask for pain, you're gonna get it right now."

At a glance, the two Campiones seemed to be conversing casually.

But Godou noticed. Doni was already making his eyes and ears as sharp as possible, trying to find the opportunity to attack.

Using his eyes, he observed Kusanagi Godou's movements, expressions, eyes, footsteps, muscle tension and center of gravity.

Using his ears, he listened carefully to Kusanagi Godou's voice, heart beat, the pulsation of blood vessels, footsteps and breathing.

Salvatore Doni was currently putting his greatest effort into getting a grasp on Kusanagi Godou's every movement. Then

taking half a step—rather, he had quietly closed in by a toe's distance.

The two of them were separated by five or six meters at most.

All he needed to do was take a big step and swing his sword, then his blade would instantly reach Godou's body.

Even so, Europe's strongest swordsman did not do that. He was using his eyes and ears to capture Godou's every movement as much as possible while gradually closing in.

Godou breathed in. Doni quietly took a step, his foot brushing against the ground.

Godou breathed out. Doni quietly took a step, his foot brushing against the ground.

I see—Godou nodded. The [Warrior] incarnation possessed powers of observation capable of understanding the enemy deeply . This ability informed him.

Doni was waiting. Waiting for the instant when Godou showed an "opening."

That said, this was not the usual kind of "opening" found in ordinary combat.

For example, if Godou were to lose patience first and step forward to attack Doni—No, the instant he intended to take a step, Doni would immediately accelerate.

As naturally as water flowing downhill, he would get near Godou and swing his sword. Under those conditions, when Doni was taking advantage of an opening that one would not normally call an opening, Godou would end up seeing Doni appearing in front of him suddenly. Indeed. Doni was able to move in this mysterious manner any time, shrinking his distance as easily as entering a friend's home, to unleash a merciless strike of his sword.

"Against an amateur like me, there's no need to use weird moves like that..."

"On the other hand, seeing as you're able to make this kind of remark at this time and place, that already proves you've already lost the right to call yourself an amateur."

Seeing Doni make a wry expression in response to his grumbles, Godou snorted.

He was now able to understand Doni's movements which used to be incomprehensible before. This was likely due to further mastering the [Warrior]'s power as well as the experience gained from prevailing in many hellish battlefields.

As much as it was not his intention, this did indeed serve as evidence of Kusanagi Godou's growth as a Campione.

Compared to the last duel, Doni was much more cautious this time. Literally without exaggeration, he was seeking to cut his opponent into halves. He did not consider needing a second or third strike at all. This was precisely the reason why he did not recklessly close in.

Splitting Kusanagi Godou into two using the first strike—

That was Doni's only goal. This was because he knew very well that bungled damage to Godou would surely result in punishment from the [Camel] incarnation.

Conversely, Godou was unable to use the [Boar] suddenly for a surprise attack.

"I've said it before at Siena. We both know each other's tricks very well. Hohohoho, although it's very challenging, it's also very fun..."

Doni's smile no longer carried the usual frivolity.

A warrior's expression. The expression of a man who enjoyed combat from the very depths of his heart—

In contrast, Godou did not harbor such a side. Currently, he had neither received any attack from Godou nor launched any attack from his own side. Even so, a violent vortex of killing intent and fighting spirit had started swirling between them while both sides bided their time.

Compared to all the intense battles Godou had experienced thus far, this was a completely foreign development.

Perhaps this was what one would call a battle between "masters of martial arts." Rather than swinging the sword, it was more important to read the enemy's intentions one step ahead, so as to aim for openings. Doni was using mysterious movement

techniques to close in while shrewdly employing strategy before an opportunity arose.

This was truly the ultimate stage in a clash between sword and sword, fist against fist—

As soon as the first attack was launched, that was the very instant when the opponent was successfully killed in one hit.

Doni held the divine sword, dangling in his right hand. Using this stance of mental nothingness, he slowly closed in again. Clearly there was still more than four meters of separation, but for some reason, Godou somehow felt that Doni was quite near already...

Just at this moment.

He caught sight of Liliana in the corner of his eye.

Imperceptibly, she had somehow circled over behind Doni's back. In her hand was the slender bag she had been holding—The heavy-looking "trump card."

However, the silver-haired knight swiftly waved her hand, making the bag disappear with magic.

Oh well, even with someone behind his back, Doni was still able to keep track of her movements using that ridiculous ultimate technique, the mind's eye. Hence, he was very likely to notice. It was quite safe to assume that attacking was not feasible.

Nevertheless, Liliana's action caused Godou's fighting spirit to be set ablaze.

In other words, what the loyal knight expressed was this: You must obtain victory one-on-one no matter what.

Godou nodded to acknowledge this message. And also to tell her not to worry, Godou twisted his lips in a savage grin.

Kusanagi Godou losing in one-on-one duel against Salvatore Doni...

Absolutely forbidden. Not by anyone but Kusanagi Godou himself!

"Let's go, Ama no Murakumo..."

Although Godou had no intention of exchanging blows of the sword, he still summoned his partner the jet-black divine sword to his right hand.

Seeing this, Doni muttered "Ehe."

"I never would have expected you to draw a sword. How considerate."

"This is for the sake of victory. However, I don't plan on fencing with you. After all, I definitely won't win that way."

"Yes yes. Now that's my Godou, capable of saying such things. Ahhh, come to think of it, that storm-making thing from earlier is a bit troublesome. Then it doesn't feel like winning a sword fight."

"Don't make me laugh. Before I can start the storm, you will have chopped me to death already."

On the other hand, for the same reason, Godou did not worry about Doni's fourth authority.

This authority, usurped from Dionysus, the god of wine and ritual madness, was capable of causing magic and divine powers to go berserk. Quite a fair amount of time was needed to activate this authority.

Thinking here, Godou smiled wryly.

With both sides knowing each other's hand completely, such an opponent was truly challenging—How interesting!

"Hohoho, you're simply adorable, summoning your sword despite knowing that."

"Shut up. At least stop saying such nonsense!"

"Hey hey, that's not what you said when we were establishing our alliance."

"That agreement was scrapped a long time ago."

In contrast to the fruitless verbal sparring, the ultimate stage was approaching.

A powerful vortex was already starting to swirl in Godou and Doni's surroundings.

This was the warning sign precipitating the activation of the " black blade," the secret technique entrusted to Godou by Athena. Salvatore Doni was a sword master in every sense of the word while Godou was nowhere near anything like that. In that case, Godou must seek out victory in a manner suited to himself... That was the idea conveyed by Godou's actions.

"There exists nothing I cannot cut! Of course, you are no exception!"

"Bring it on if you think you can!"

Doni took a step and performed a diagonal slash from below.

At the same time, Godou swung Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, using these two hands that used to swing a baseball bat on a daily basis, gripping the divine sword in the same manner as a bat.

Godou's target was the supreme mystic sword—the Divine Sword of Salvation—that Doni was swinging.

Using the abilities of Verethragna's incarnation, the [Warrior], Godou understood Doni's swordsmanship. This was a diagonal slash aiming to cut from the left hip to the right shoulder, unleashed from the sword dangling from his right hand.

In response, Godou swung his divine sword to intercept using the principles of batting against a slightly low ball aimed towards the outer corner.

Using his inborn dynamic vision, a Campione's concentration, the [Warrior]'s powers of observation, along with a former batter's swing...

The multiplied effect of all these factors allowed Godou to succeed on his first try. He succeeded in stopping Salvatore Doni's slash in midswing.

—Clang!

The Divine Sword of Salvation and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi clashed intensely, producing a heavy metallic sound.

However, Doni's right arm glowed with silver light at this time. He was using the authority of the magic sword, the [Ripping Arm of Silver]. Whether the frivolous Campione was swinging a bat or a blunt sword, this turned the weapon into a blade where no existence in this world could not be cut...!

Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi's blade measured three feet and three and a half inches. In other words, the length of a bamboo pole exceeding one meter.

Doni's magic sword was clashing violently with this blade, twenty centimeters or so from the tip. Then Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was sliced through at this position.

Then Doni's magic sword continued without stopping the slash's momentum, cutting Godou's body in half—That was originally supposed to happen.

"What!?"

However, Doni ended up being the one surprised.

Despite combining multiple superb sword techniques, his attack did not advance any further. The Divine Sword of Salvation was stuck to Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, like iron drawn to a magnet. This was due to the supergravity residing in the "black blade."

Causing a gravitational storm and producing the power to suck in all existence required a lot of time for preparation.

However, the level needed to attract a single sword was a completely different matter. However, just when Godou's plan was taking effect, Doni also chanted spell words.

"O priestesses of Bacchus, be drunk with the wine of gods!"

This was the authority for making magical power and divine abilities lose control.

In a split second, Doni did the same thing as Godou. Even though invoking the full effect required a lot of time, it was also possible to activate quickly to achieve partial effects—

The produced effect caused the suction of supergravity to release for an instant, thus allowing the Divine Sword of Salvation to separate from Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Swinging the divine sword, Doni stabbed at Godou's throat directly.

A thrust of assured death. Godou instantly moved right, narrowly evading the attack. However, the sword ended up stabbing deeply into his left shoulder. Both the shoulder and his left arm lost all feeling.

A very deep wound. A great volume of blood splashed out.

"Yahhhhhh!"

In exchange for the injury, Godou invoked the [Camel]. Then he executed a spinning kick aimed high!

A flash of the right foot. This high kick ended up striking Doni in the temple splendidly. However, the sensation on Godou's instep felt like kicking steel—Doni had turned into a body of steel at the last second.

Seeing as that was the case, Godou sent magical power to the tip of his foot.

An explosion was produced at the contact point between Doni's temple and the foot. Due to the impact, Doni's head and body began to sway.

This was the move Godou had learnt earlier during the battle against the "King of the End."

The explosion's shock should have permeated the steel body's interior. His brain apparently shaken by the impact, Doni fell over despite having no injuries. The impact had caused a concussion.

In that very instant, Godou and Doni's gazes met.

The two of them confirmed each other as formidable opponents again. Godou made a sour look while Doni smiled fearlessly with delight—then collapsed. This was their second duel.

Upon reflection over the battle afterwards, in actual fact, the two of them had merely executed two attacks each.

But despite merely two exchanges, the density of content was immense!

Godou exhaled deeply, relieved that he was safe and sound. Furthermore, he was finally victorious over his fated rival. Godou could not help but raise his right fist and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi up high to express his delight.

Part 4

Kusanagi Godou had defeated Salvatore Doni.

At the same time, high up in the sky, the armored archdemon had also pierced the "serpent of lightning" with its longsword. The lightning aggregate was thus completely annihilated. That minion or avatar of Madame Aisha had won.

"At least it's dealt with, just barely..."

Collapsing from exhaustion, Madame Aisha bent over and sat down hard on the ground.

Hovering in midair, the archdemon's form gradually turned hazy and disappeared.

"I'm so hungry I can't stand it, I won't be able to move for now... "

"You finally won, Godou!"

"King Salvatore doesn't look like he's still possessed."

On one side, Madame Aisha was collapsed on the ground in exhaustion on her own.

On the other side, Godou's surroundings were exceptionally lively. Erica and Ena had run over with smiles written all over their faces. Yuri and Liliana were also smiling slightly further away.

Godou nodded to his companions. Then Erica spoke with deliberate mischief:

"By the way, although this victory is indeed worth celebrating, I still feel that you should control your joyful emotions a little. Tentatively speaking, you are still the self-styled pacifist after all."

"'Tentatively' and 'self-styled' are unnecessary!"

Godou was still holding in his right hand the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi that he had been raising towards the sky. The divine sword's blade was severed twenty centimeters from the tip. Taken together with the stab wound that Doni had inflicted on Godou's left shoulder, these could probably be called wounds of honor.

However, the battle was not over yet.

"The Divine Sword of Salvation!?"

Liliana suddenly cried out while looking at Doni who was lying on the side.

While the Campione was sleeping with a face like a baby's, the Divine Sword of Salvation had disappeared from his hand. At some unknown point in time, it had stabbed itself upright in the ground, ten-odd meters ahead.

Also, the divine sword was surrounded by a mass of black mist.

"The goddess Artio... No, it's Artio's divine spirit!"

Yuri revealed the answer, presumably seeing with the power of spirit vision.

Immediately, Godou and his group's surroundings started to glow. This plain that had become a battlefield—the vicinity—suddenly released golden light.

"This is... the essence of the earth?"

Surveying the glowing ground, Liliana murmured in trepidation.

Furthermore, the black mist surrounding the Divine Sword of Salvation scattered.

'Allow me to thank you, godslayer of the sword. Using the time you bought, I gradually gathered the essence of the earth...'

As expected, it was the goddess Artio's voice.

'Hoho. This land shall wither for a hundred years, turning into a useless wasteland... This too, cannot be helped. This essence and my soul shall serve as substitutes for the blood of resurrection...'

Godou was shocked. Speaking of which, what allowed the Divine Sword of Salvation and the "King of the End" to awaken was the goddess Artio's life force, right?

'Slothful hero, descend upon here once more—'

Saying that, the mist, which was the goddess's spirit, dissipated. Completely annihilated this time.

Also, the golden glow released by the ground began to contract. However, Godou felt bone-chilling terror. This was because the surrounding scenery changed as the light dissipated.

Simply stated, this had become a land of death.

The vegetation on this wide open plain had withered in an instant.

Surveying the ground, it was white all around. Parched, bare soil was exposed. With the soil virtually drained of water, white sand scattered and blew in the wind.

In the past, trees had offered shade to travelers, scattered sparsely across the landscape.

These were all withered now. All branches and leaves, all fruits were completely dead. Trunks, branches and leaves were dried and withered as though all nutrients had been sucked away.

Also, the wind blowing across this land was exceptionally cold.

Probably an effect of Madame Aisha using her winter authority. The chilly wind felt as cold as midwinter. As a result, the wasteland image was further reinforced.

"I-It feels like something terrible has happened..."

Perhaps out of self-reprimand, Madame Aisha was huddling. However, there was no time to be concerned about her. Godou instantly yelled out:

"Everyone, hurry and leave this place! Take Aisha-san and idiot Doni together and get as far away as possible!"

His companions could probably predict what was about to happen here.

Having the greatest arm strength, Erica carried Doni's slender but muscular body on her shoulder while Ena urged Madame Aisha to escape as quickly as possible.

Yuri and Liliana also nodded lightly before leaving, giving Godou concise encouragement.

Next, Godou turned his sharp gaze towards the place ten-odd meters ahead.

Standing upright by the Divine Sword of Salvation was an aristocrat.

The ferocity on his handsome face was as clear to see as rust on iron. There was a gloomy shadow of weariness on his face. Even so , the man's prim and proper facial features exuded a sense of coolness...

Naturally, this was the "King of the End." Nevertheless, there was no color.

What should have been pale-white hair, a pale and handsome face, the clothes on his body, everything was covered by a thin layer of gray color. The only exception was the divine sword stabbed upright by his side.

In one neat motion, the gray aristocrat drew his favorite blade, shining with platinum luster.

"Never did I expect a reunion so soon... We meet again, Kusanagi Godou."

"Yeah. But you still don't look like you're in a peak condition."

Holding the divine sword, the hero's standing posture remained awe-inspiring and sacred as usual.

However, using his eyes of a Campione's, Godou could tell that his opponent was in an unstable state no matter how he looked. It felt that the "King of the End" would simply vanish from a light kick.

"This cannot be helped either... Is probably what ought to be said."

The gray hero admitted with a magnanimous voice.

"Using the last of her life, my fake mother gathered up the earth's essence to offer to me. However, this level of essence is far from enough. I estimate that I can only remain on the surface for the duration of a single sword swing. Nevertheless—"

Candidly admitting his disadvantage, the "King of the End" continued indifferently:

"I believe that this duration is more than enough to exterminate the three of you, godslayers. Because right now, I am about to use the covenant's great ritual..."

"What did you say!?"

"My surrogate mother has already ratified the covenant of Devil King extermination. When a deity, whose name is linked to the covenant, dies under a Devil King's tyranny, I am obliged to unleash the strike of vengeance. As the executor of the ancient covenant..."

After finishing these murmurs, the "King of the End" raised the divine sword high up towards the sky.

Gazing at Godou with eyes showing the color of weariness like rust, he spoke at the same time:

"Kusanagi Godou. For the extermination of you and the two godslayers who departed, I shall proceed to swing my sword once. If you are able to withstand it, this battle is your victory."

The divine sword's blade, raised up high towards the heavens—

High above, a platinum ball of light appeared with a diameter of a hundred something meters. This sphere of light, resembling a mini-sun, was crackling with white lightning.

"However, that is impossible. This will be my victory."

The light of salvation, which Godou had confronted head on a number of times already, activated.

Nevertheless, the "King of the End"'s entire body was filled with astounding magical power.

This was magical power equal to that residing in the monkey king's body when the Great Sage Equaling Heaven merged with his two subordinate gods. If this level of magical power were unleashed in a strike of salvation, even the "black blade" would be unable to resist!

The instant he was certain of this, Godou spoke softly:

"Are you still able to fight, Ama no Murakumo...!?"

'Affirmative!'

Despite having its front tip sliced off, the partner answered with full force of vigor.

Godou himself was severely injured as well, stabbed in the left shoulder by Doni's sword—But even so, he still acted decisively, running towards the "King of the End" while holding Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi one-handed.

Even in a mutual clash, there was no chance for victory. After all, the opponent was the divine sword wielder!

Godou instantly made his decision and started running. The " King of the End" gazed calmly at Godou. Having fought

godslayers many times in the past, he probably predicted this type of action.

"Doing this as expected huh."

Just as he nodded, numerous flashes of lightning started to descend from the sphere of light in the sky.

It was like a sudden rainstorm, except with raindrops of lightning. In just a matter of a few dozen seconds, hundreds, thousands of lightning strikes were pouring down on this desolate land of death.

In order to evade all this lightning to approach the "King of the End," there was no other way apart from using the [Raptor]!

Invoking Verethragna's seventh incarnation, Godou entered the realm of divine speed.

Consequently, he was able to witness the tragic fate of the devastated surroundings as clearly as watching in slow motion. The lightning of salvation kept falling nonstop while exploding waves of heat and shock tore through the ground. Furthermore, this devastation was spreading out several kilometers in all directions, resulting in a situation akin to bombardment.

Godou weaved left and right to evade the rain of lightning while racing towards the "King of the End."

Thanks to the [Camel] he had been using until just now, conferring great resilience against pain, the left shoulder did not

hurt so obviously. But having switched to the [Raptor] now, every step he took brought intense pain to his body. His left arm was hanging without any feeling due to the sword wound.

Even so, Godou still gritted his teeth, intending to unleash a strike at the "King of the End."

At this moment, someone appeared between Godou and the hero.

Completely wrapped in white cloth, a war god whose face was hidden behind a red mask, wielding a thick and heavy blade. More importantly, this war god was also a user of divine speed just like Godou.

While evading the rain of lightning strikes, he or she raced over with divine speed.

Who would have expected two against one in this situation!? Just as Godou gritted his teeth...

'King—'

Held in his right hand, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi whispered softly.

Godou prepared his resolve. He intended to brush past the masked war god blocking his way, fully unleashing divine speed until arriving at the "King of the End."

Intruding into this path ahead, the masked war god also used divine speed again.

The unidentified god was just about to swing the great blade in his hand to slay Kusanagi Godou!

Ordered to leave by Kusanagi Godou just now...

The girls serving him immediately took action to obey his command. Liliana used flight magic to carry the two Campiones with them, landing at a spot three or four kilometers away from the center of the commotion.

This place happened to be the boundary between the wasteland of death and ordinary grassland.

Over a thousand Frankish warriors were resting at this place. They were the people who had just escaped from the archdemon's fireballs.

Seeing them, Madame Aisha's eyes suddenly flashed brightly.

But she immediately noticed "some sort of phenomenon" and pointed in that direction.

"E-Everyone! This is terrible, look!"

Madame Aisha was pointing to a tornado that was advancing rapidly across this plain in Germania.

The tornado entered the wasteland of death. Up in the sky over in that direction, a giant ball of light manifested. Undoubtedly, the Divine Sword of Salvation was about to awaken.

The tornado was heading in that sphere of light's direction.

"Swift and fierce as a gale... One of the devil-slaying heroes... Godou-san!?"

Having received a spirit vision, Yuri whispered solemnly then suddenly called out with a face full of worry.

Naturally, the one who was startled upon hearing her words was the clever and sharp Erica.

"That's the 'King of the End''s companion! The one who was blocking in front of Godou and Sir Salvatore last time!"

"Then it's two against one now. That's very bad for His Majesty! "

"Liliana-san!"

Ena was surprised while Yuri gazed at the silver-haired knight.

Urged by the Hime-Miko's gaze, Liliana instantly started preparations. She summoned the "trump card" that Kusanagi Godou had saw earlier.

A slender bag made of cloth. Opening it, a steel-colored weapon was revealed inside.

'I have only one parting gift for the two of you who are about to embark on this journey through time.'

'That said, depending on use, it can easily be turned into a weapon capable of annihilating an army. Hence, I only permit one single use. Prudently decide on the timing."

'Well then, goodbye. May luck accompany you always.'

This was the astounding parting gift that the masked hero had bestowed upon their departure.

Seeing this object, Erica stared wide-eyed.

"Lily, this is!?"

"John Pluto Smith-sama's magic gun... The tool entrusted with His Highness's magic projectile authority, for the sake of traversing the corridor of time!"

While shouting these words, Liliana pulled the trigger of this large-caliber revolver.

Currently on the other side of time, what was Smith doing? Liliana had no idea. Perhaps he was still waiting at Plutarch's Residence, or maybe he had returned to his base of operations, Los Angeles.

However, it was definitely transmitted.

After cocking the hammer and pulling the trigger, Liliana could feel the massive divine power residing in the gun.

She pointed the muzzle towards the wasteland of death which was being devastated by lightning. From the muzzle, a flash of pale light was released, flying like a ferocious dragon of light.

Liliana did not aim at any target. The steel-colored magic gun did not require anything of that sort.

The pale flash of light automatically flew towards the target depicted in Liliana's mind—the war god of wind. Furthermore, it transcended ordinary speeds to achieve divine speed.

John Pluto Smith's magic projectiles were even able to reach the realm of divine speed!

"Ama no Murakumo, pass this message to His Majesty! Tell him that Liliana-san will find a way to deal with the war god of wind!"

Ena desperately called to the partner far away.

The war god of wind had suddenly appeared, blocking in front of Godou.

However, having received Ena's message passed through Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, Godou decided to trust his companions and continued to rush forward with the [Raptor]'s divine speed—

Then he witnessed it, the flash of pale light, suddenly flying over.

It was quite similar to the magic projectiles often used by the masked godslayer. Residing in it were divine powers that ordinary bullets could not possibly possess, such as automatic tracking and reaching the realm of divine speed.

The magic projectile unerringly struck the masked war god's flank.

As a member of indestructible [Steel], the war god was completely unharmed. However, the impact from the magic projectile sent him flying far away.

There were no more obstacles. It happened exactly as Ena had told him through Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. So this was the true identity of the "trump card" held by Liliana!

Feeling gratitude for his companions' assistance, Godou finally arrived before the "King of the End."

The gray hero was currently pouring a massive amount of magical power into his raised sword. From high above, the white sphere of light was releasing lightning with greater intensity.

Using divine speed to reach here, Godou slashed with Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Rather than aiming at the "King of the End"'s body, he targeted the Divine Sword of Salvation that was raised towards the sky.

The instant the two sacred swords of steel clashed violently, Godou chanted spell words.

"O immortal sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion! "

Verethragna's third incarnation was the [White Stallion]. Having caused great suffering to the Franks, the hero had ironically become "the enemy of the populace," sufficient to be targeted by the light's hammer of justice.

At this moment, Godou allowed Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to absorb the [White Stallion]'s might.

The black divine blade of Wakoku[4] was infused with golden splendor, becoming a "fragment of the sun" in the form of a sword. Withstanding this massive power completely, the Divine Sword of Salvation also erupted with dazzling brilliance.

The blades of the mystic sword of white and the sword of black struck each other for roughly ten-odd seconds.

Then the white sun disappeared from overhead. The rainstorm of lightning also stopped. Attacked by the fragment of the sun, the Divine Sword of Salvation suffered extreme damage as expected.

The "King of the End" proceeded to disappear again, having exhausted all power in his sword strike.

With its owner gone, the Divine Sword of Salvation fell down, stabbing its tip into the ground.

But Godou was battered all over as well, his left arm dangling limp. Due to the strain of using the [Raptor] and the [White Stallion] simultaneously, his brain suffered searing pain as though it were being cut open. Also, not only was the paralysis accompanying the end of the [Raptor]'s usage still present, but it also happened immediately...

Finally, victory was obtained at long last.

However, Godou glared at the Divine Sword of Salvation, stabbed upright in the ground.

The hero's sword was still infused with platinum light, shining brilliantly. Godou spoke with certainty:

"You're still alive, right?"

'Yes, it is as you say. But even so, the fact of your victory does not change. Truly, you were magnificent.'

The Divine Sword of Salvation answered in an aristocrat's cool tone of voice.

Indeed—Godou nodded. Even with the body destroyed, so long as this sword existed in the world, the "King of the End" would not perish. Surely, he was going to reawaken countless times.

"The heroes of steel pretty much all have immortal bodies, right ? So this is the form of your immortality..."

'Indeed. Provided the Divine Sword of Salvation continues to exist, I can resurrect repeatedly on the earth. Even if the blade is covered with rust and decrepit beyond compare, so long as the correct sequence is executed, I can descend once again. In the same manner as that performed by my fake mother this time...'

This was the manifestation of the "King of the End"'s immortality. Godou muttered softly:

"This is such a troublesome power..."

'My apologies. Our reunion shall come eventually. Pray that some sort of ill fate shall arise and bind us by then.'

"Why?"

'Meeting and slaughtering opponents for whom I bear neither anger nor hatred... Isn't that simply too tragic?'

Leaving these words behind, the Divine Sword of Salvation vanished.

Most likely, it had gone off somewhere, in order to remain in deep slumber at some place in this early fifth-century world, patiently biding its time for revival.

Pondering the wandering hero's future direction, Godou sighed .

Epilogue

After Godou and the other's battle ended, the world welcomed peace once more—Of course that was impossible.

Early fifth-century Europe was a war-torn era to begin with. The embers of war and turmoil scattered in various places were being lit ablaze. Or perhaps, they were already burning with great intensity.

It was clearly very dangerous if the modern Campiones continued to linger in this era.

"They're all individually capable of destroying armies by themselves to establish their own country."

"Also, it's absolutely impossible for these three—Godou, Sir Salvatore and Madame Aisha—to live in seclusion together, right?"

"As expected, returning as soon as possible is imperative."

"E-Excuse me, everyone. Saying such things so loudly seems to be a bit..."

After the battle, Ena, Erica and Liliana were all nodding at one another. Despite raising objections cautiously, Yuri was not defending anyone in particular.

That said, they were unable to return immediately to the modern world.

Madame Aisha's "corridor" only opened on the night of a full moon. Also, the night after the "King of the End" disappeared was a crescent moon, which meant they needed to wait half a month for the next full moon.

After learning of the situation, a certain man smiled frivolously.

"Just use the same method as when we came here. All I need to do is make that corridor go berserk and the entrance will automatically open, then it'll suck us all in, right?"

"Who knows if the same thing will happen as last time, so that's a definite no!"

"Oh well, whatever. But waiting half a month is too boring."

"This will proceed firmly no matter how boring!"

Naturally, Godou immediately rejected Doni's opinion and chose the honest route of "waiting."

However, there were other things that needed to be handled during this period. Namely, returning to Colonia Agrippina to disband the alliance of the Franks of which Doni and Madame Aisha had assumed the role of great chieftain.

This turned out to be surprisingly difficult.

Godou originally thought that the matter could be easily dealt with using Madame Aisha's charm authority.

"I-I already expressed my wish to retire, but pushed by everyone's zeal, I ended up going back again!"

The main culprits included the woman who uttered this comeback declaration as well as certain people who intended to have her resume the great chieftain's role as "Salvatore Doni the Second."

While they were busy handling these matters, more and more people began to worship Kusanagi Godou as one of the city's bigshots.

They all regarded Godou as Colonia Agrippina's ruler in practice. For some reason, the number of servants (female) working in Godou's residence doubled.

Influential people from neighboring areas would frequently bring beautiful women along to offer their "greetings" at the residence. Such was the strange situation that evolved.

During this time, although Erica, Yuri, Liliana and Ena had some slight disputes between the four of them, Godou still managed to live his days peacefully—

Before he knew it, the night of the full moon was already fast upon them.

The corridor was located in Uldin's forest.

That night, Godou's group informed the Hunnic godslayer of their "departure."

With Liliana present, reaching that place did not take much time. During the daylight hours of that day, the modern time travelers all paid Uldin's fortress a visit. The liberal Uldin prepared a feast in advance to wait for the group's arrival.

"Well, I can smell the scent of war spreading from various places. Right now, I'm considering how to handle those cities downstream."

Uldin spoke while bumping cups with Godou who was drinking water.

The Hunnic Devil King's base of operations in this forest was located on the Rhine's shore while Augusta Raurica, Colonia Agrippina and many other Roman colonial cities were situated downstream on the shores of this river.

Uldin was literally the most powerful person in the Rhine basin's area.

"Since you are leaving, comrade, it can't be helped. Why don't I simply take my tribe to visit various places, thereby using this opportunity to find a man fit to be my proxy? Not a bad idea. Perhaps I might end up nurturing a promising child."

No way—While listening to Uldin speak, Godou began to imagine.

A person nurtured in such a manner could very well end up as " Attila, the great king of the Huns" one day, leaving his name in history while being protected by Devil King Uldin.

"By the way, comrade, I saw your battle against the war god who was holding the strange blade."

"Just as expected, huh."

Godou was told that during that battle, Uldin had also visited the vicinity of Colonia Agrippina.

In that case, being able to scout the Franks and the "hero who exterminated all godslayers" was no surprise as long as he sent out those pterosaurs. Godou nodded.

"It is quite unclear how strong he is. However... It's quite strange how easily he exited the stage in contrast to that title."

"Even if that guy turns into a sword, it looks like he'll still reawaken again."

One day, the "King of the End" was going to fight the godslayers of this era. Not Kusanagi Godou.

Godou told Uldin these warnings as a parting gift.

"That's why it's possible that you'll meet that guy in the future."

"Got it. When the time comes, I will be very careful. When we saw that war god together, Ruska also spoke a strange oracle."

Uldin's wife, Ruska, was a very powerful user of spirit vision. Just like Yuri's predictions, her warnings could not be ignored.

"This is what Ruska said. That war god will further increase in power during his incessant wandering. A hero who persists in the journey of Devil King extermination."

A journey undertaken to defeat all Devil Kings, increasing in power throughout his wandering days, finally completing his mission.

This was almost like a role playing game, Godou thought. Then thinking over it once again, it was probably the opposite. It was probably the story of the "King of the End" that served as the prototype myth for this sort of "legendary hero's saga"...

Spontaneously, Godou looked up at the sky. Up until now, it had been a red evening sky.

But now, the sun had already set, causing the sky to darken.

Hanging high in the eastern sky was the full moon, shining clear and bright. It was about time to set off. That said, always being unable to enjoy a relaxing journey could be considered the source of Godou's troubles.

"We ended up spending almost two months here huh."

Godou muttered with heartfelt emotion.

This was like taking a long summer holiday in advance and felt quite unbelievable.

Then back to time in the present...

A girl stood upright on a mountain's peak at an altitude of 1912m above sea level. She was dressed in a white garment reminiscent of ancient Greece. Her silver hair reached down to her shoulders while shimmering with faint light as though droplets of the moon had melded into it.

Adding to the allure of her young but beautiful face was a pair of eyes, the color of darkness—

It was currently nighttime on the peak. The girl exuded a quiet sense of beauty, quite fitting for the pitch-black darkness of the night.

However, the wind blowing around the peak was quite noisy. A strong gust of wind, blowing across the southern Mediterranean Sea, was producing rumbling howls.

This lone peak of Mont Ventoux stood on the land known to humans as Provence.

Moreover, the name of Mont Ventoux even carried the meaning of "wind"...

Nevertheless, even the bone-chilling wind was unable to disturb the girl's serenity. Her white garment and silver hair fluttered in the wind while she was standing casually on this snowy peak.

Naturally, rather than an ordinary mountain climber, the girl was a supernatural existence.

"Thou hast arrived, O wind king."

The girl smiled with delight and whispered.

From between the stars shining above the mountain peak, a gust of whirlwind was blowing here.

Blowing from the gaps between the stars, the wind changed forms before the girl, turning into a war god whose body was wrapped in white cloth and whose face was hidden behind a red mask.

"Hoho. Since the previous Witch Queen appointed the war god of the lance as her knight, one should require an equivalent servant. O wind king, respond to mine invitation."

The girl was meant to serve the hero, the "King of the End."

The wind king was the war god whom one could call his right hand man, rather than the likes of a subordinate god. Like Lancelot du Lac of old, the wind king was a god assisting him as a brother-in-arms. His valor rivaled that of the war god of white. A top-class warrior and a hero at the same time.

Having spent a month's time to complete the wind king's invitation ceremony, the girl smiled with queenly dignity.

"In that case, what follows ought to be searching for the slothful hero, is it not...?"

The girl gazed into the eastern sky while murmuring.

"Or perchance, that hitherto unencountered opponent, bound to one by ill fate. Hohoho, truly a conundrum herewithal."

The girl was unaware that three hours later, three godslayers were about to return from ancient Gaul. Among the three was a youth named Kusanagi Godou.

Furthermore, she did not know that the opponent of ill fate, carved beneath her eyelids, bore the same face as this youth—

The beginning of the end was imminent.

That very moment was already approaching, albeit slowly.

Afterword

It's been a while, everyone.

This series finally reaches its fifteenth volume. A number that would be totally fine for an ending.

Despite reaching this volume count, with the anime's broadcast already ended as well, let alone falling, the sales of this series have grown nonstop in the opposite direction, resulting in a development that contradicts the industry's norms.

This is all thanks to your love and support, readers.

For this, I once again express my solemn gratitude.

So, having reached Volume 15, a certain character finally makes a first appearance.

Only appearing by name until now, he makes his first appearance in an incomplete state. With this, the story enters the next phase.

Once it's time for the volume where his true identity is elucidated, it might be fun for me to simply imitate Shinjou Kazuma-sensei and gather answers from readers on Twitter. But at the same time, it would be quite sad if no one participated. Bearing such fears, in the end, I gave up on the idea. (wry smile)

Due to quite an increase in clues starting from Volume 12, it is possible that there are people who already realized his true identity...

Also, Volume 3 of the manga adaptation has also gone for sale at the same time as Volume 15.

Included with that as a gift are appendix notes about the seven Campiones.

This is information that summarizes the stats of the seven godslayers where finally all members have made their appearance. In particular, there should be quite a lot of content about authorities where "this may be the first time they are described in such detail."

Readers who enjoy this type of content, do please check it out.

(Due to massive spoilers for Volumes 14 and 15, the descriptions about Madame Aisha are glossed over in brief...)

Okay okay. About the next volume's content, I'm currently still thinking.

I am considering various ideas such as writing a certain little story mentioned at the end of Volume 15, or content related to Valentine's Day, or how about I simply do a spin-off like "Case Files of Annie Charlton", etc. Letting the Marquis and Onee-sama reappear after their long absences also sounds quite interesting.

Takedzuki Jou, September 2013

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Urashima Tarou**(浦): a Japanese legend about a fisherman who visits the palace of a dragon god beneath the ocean. After a stay of three days, he returns to his village to find himself 300 years into the future.[1]
   Rip Van Winkle: a short story about a man who wandered up a mountain away from his wife's nagging, took a nap and woke up twenty years later.[2]
2. ↑ **Yatagarasu**(八): the "eight-span crow" is a symbol of guidance and the bird's appearance is taken as evidence of divine intervention in human affairs. [3]
   Sarutahiko(猿): the leader of earthly *kami* (gods/spirits) and seen as a symbol of strength and guidance. Also the patron of martial arts such as aikido.[4]
3. ↑ **Hassou-no-kamae**(八): one of the five stances of kendo, an offensive posture with the sword pointing upright and the blade sloping slightly to the rear.[5]
4. ↑ **Wakoku**(倭): the ancient term for the islands of Japan dating back to before it was recognized as a country.